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THE WRITINGS OF
BRET HARTE

WITH INTRODUCTIONS, GLOSSARY, AND INDEXES

ILLUSTRATED

VOLUME VII

BRET HARTE, FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS FALL, TAKEN IN 1895

Stories of California and the Frontier

CRESSY

AND OTHER TALES

BY

BRET HARTE

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CRESSY AND OTHER TALES

CRESSY

CHAPTER I

As the master of the Indian Spring school emerged from the pine woods into the little clearing before the schoolhouse, he stopped whistling, put his hat less jauntily on his head, threw away some wild flowers he had gathered on his way, and otherwise assumed the severe demeanor of his profession and his mature age — which was at least twenty. Not that he usually felt this an assumption ; it was a firm conviction of his serious nature that he impressed others, as he did himself, with the blended austerity and *ennui* of deep and exhausted experience.

The building which was assigned to him and his flock by the Board of Education of Tuolumne County, California, had been originally a church. It still bore a faded odor of sanctity, mingled, however, with a later and slightly alcoholic breath of political discussion, the result of its weekly occupation under the authority of the Board as a Tribune for the enunciation of party principles and devotion to the Liberties of the People. There were a few dog-eared hymn-books on the teacher's desk, and the blackboard but imperfectly hid an impassioned appeal to the citizens of Indian Spring to "Rally" for Stebbins as Supervisor. The master had been struck with the size of the

black type in which this placard was printed, and with a shrewd perception of its value to the round wandering eyes of his smaller pupils, allowed it to remain as a pleasing example of orthography. Unfortunately, although subdivided and spelt by them in its separate letters with painful and perfect accuracy, it was collectively known as "Wally," and its general import productive of vague hilarity.

Taking a large key from his pocket, the master unlocked the door and threw it open, stepping back with a certain precaution begotten of his experience in once finding a small but sociable rattlesnake coiled up near the threshold. A slight disturbance which followed his intrusion showed the value of that precaution, and the fact that the room had been already used for various private and peaceful gatherings of animated nature. An irregular attendance of yellow-birds and squirrels dismissed themselves hurriedly through the broken floor and windows, but a golden lizard, stiffened suddenly into stony fright on the edge of an open arithmetic, touched the heart of the master so strongly by its resemblance to some kept-in and forgotten scholar who had succumbed over the task he could not accomplish, that he was seized with compunction.

Recovering himself, and reëstablishing, as it were, the decorous discipline of the room by clapping his hands and saying "Sho!" he passed up the narrow aisle of benches, replacing the forgotten arithmetic, and picking up from the desks here and there certain fragmentary pieces of plaster and crumbling wood that had fallen from the ceiling, as if this grove of Academus had been shedding its leaves overnight. When he reached his own desk he lifted the lid and remained for some moments motionless, gazing into it. His apparent meditation however was simply the combined reflection of his own features in a small pocket-mirror in its recesses and a perplexing doubt in his mind whether the sacrifice of his budding mustache was not

essential to the professional austerity of his countenance. But he was presently aware of the sound of small voices, light cries, and brief laughter scattered at vague and remote distances from the schoolhouse — not unlike the birds and squirrels he had just dispossessed. He recognized by these signs that it was nine o'clock, and his scholars were assembling.

They came in their usual desultory fashion — the fashion of country school-children the world over — irregularly, spasmodically, and always as if accidentally ; a few hand-in-hand, others driven ahead of or dropped behind their elders ; some in straggling groups more or less coherent and at times only connected by far-off intermediate voices scattered on a space of half a mile, but never quite alone ; always preoccupied by something else than the actual business on hand ; appearing suddenly from ditches, behind trunks, and between fence-rails ; cropping up in unexpected places along the road after vague and purposeless détours — seemingly going anywhere and everywhere but to school ! So unlooked-for, in fact, was their final arrival that the master, who had a few moments before failed to descry a single torn straw hat or ruined sunbonnet above his visible horizon, was always startled to find them suddenly under his windows, as if, like the birds, they had alighted from the trees. Nor was their moral attitude towards their duty any the more varied ; they always arrived as if tired and reluctant, with a doubting sulkiness that perhaps afterwards beamed into a charming hypocrisy, but invariably temporizing with their instincts until the last moment, and only relinquishing possible truancy on the very threshold. Even after they were marshaled on their usual benches they gazed at each other every morning with a perfectly fresh astonishment and a daily recurring enjoyment of some hidden joke in this tremendous *rencontre*.

It had been the habit of the master to utilize these pre-

liminary vagrancies of his little flock by inviting them on assembling to recount any interesting incident of their journey hither; or failing this, from their not infrequent shyness in expressing what had secretly interested them, any event that had occurred within their knowledge since they last met. He had done this, partly to give them time to recover themselves in that more formal atmosphere, and partly, I fear, because, notwithstanding his conscientious gravity, it greatly amused him. It also diverted them from their usual round-eyed, breathless contemplation of himself — a regular morning inspection which generally embraced every detail of his dress and appearance, and made every change or deviation the subject of whispered comment or stony astonishment. He knew that they knew him more thoroughly than he did himself, and shrank from the intuitive vision of these small clairvoyants.

"Well?" said the master gravely.

There was the usual interval of bashful hesitation, verging on nervous hilarity or hypocritical attention. For the last six months this question by the master had been invariably received each morning as a veiled pleasantry which might lead to baleful information or conceal some query out of the dreadful books before him. Yet this very element of danger had its fascinations. Johnny Filgee, a small boy, blushed violently, and without getting up, began hurriedly in a high key, "Tige ith got," and then suddenly subsided into a whisper.

"Speak up, Johnny," said the master encouragingly.

"Please, sir, it ain't anythin' he 's seed — nor any real news," said Rupert Filgee, his elder brother, rising with family concern and frowning openly upon Johnny; "it 's jest his foolishness; he oughter be licked." Finding himself unexpectedly on his feet, and apparently at the end of a long speech, he colored also, and then said hurriedly, "Jimmy Snyder — *he* seed suthin'. Ask *him!*" and sat down — a recognized hero.

Every eye, including the master's, was turned on Jimmy Snyder. But that youthful observer, instantly diving his head and shoulders into his desk, remained there gurgling as if under water. Two or three nearest him endeavored with some struggling to bring him to an intelligible surface again. The master waited patiently. Johnny Filgee took advantage of the diversion to begin again in a high key, "Tige ith got thix," and subsided.

"Come, Jimmy," said the master, with a touch of peremptoriness. Thus adjured, Jimmy Snyder came up glowingly, and bristling with full stops and exclamation points. "Seed a black b'ar comin' outer Daves' woods," he said excitedly. "Nigh to me ez you be. 'N big ez a hoss; 'n snarlin'! 'n snappin'! — like gosh! Kem along — ker — clump torords me. Reckoned he'd skeer me! Did n't skeer me worth a cent. I heaved a rock at him — I did now!" (in defiance of murmurs of derisive comment) — "'n he slid. Ef he 'd kem up furder I 'd hev up with my slate and swotted him over the snoot — bet your boots!"

The master here thought fit to interfere, and gravely point out that the habit of striking bears as large as a horse with a school-slate was equally dangerous to the slate (which was also the property of Tuolumne County) and to the striker; and that the verb "to swot" and the noun substantive "snoot" were likewise indefensible, and not to be tolerated. Thus admonished, Jimmy Snyder, albeit unshaken in his faith in his own courage, sat down.

A slight pause ensued. The youthful Filgee, taking advantage of it, opened in a higher key, "Tige ith" — but the master's attention was here diverted by the searching eyes of Octavia Dean, a girl of eleven, who after the fashion of her sex preferred a personal recognition of her presence before she spoke. Succeeding in catching his eye, she threw back her long hair from her shoulders with an easy habitual gesture, rose, and, with a faint accession of color, said: —

"Cressy McKinstry came home from Sacramento. Mrs. McKinstry told mother she 's comin' back here to school."

The master looked up with an alacrity perhaps inconsistent with his cynical austerity. Seeing the young girl curiously watching him with an expectant smile, he regretted it. Cressy McKinstry, who was sixteen years old, had been one of the pupils he had found at the school when he first came. But as he had also found that she was there in the extraordinary attitude of being "engaged" to one Seth Davis, a fellow pupil of nineteen, and as most of the courtship was carried on freely and unceremoniously during school hours with the full permission of the master's predecessor, the master had been obliged to point out to the parents of the devoted couple the embarrassing effects of this association on the discipline of the school. The result had been the withdrawal of the lovers, and possibly the good will of the parents. The return of the young lady was consequently a matter of some significance. Had the master's protest been accepted, or had the engagement itself been broken off? Either was not improbable. His momentary loss of attention was Johnny Filgee's great gain.

"Tige," said Johnny, with sudden and alarming distinctness, "ith got thix pupths — mothly yaller."

In the laugh which followed this long withheld announcement of an increase in the family of Johnny's yellow and disreputable setter "Tiger," who usually accompanied him to school and howled outside, the master joined with marked distinctness. Then he said, with equally marked severity, "Books!" The little levee was ended, and school began.

It continued for two hours with short sighs, corrugations of small foreheads, the complaining cries and scratchings of slate pencils over slates, and other signs of minor anguish among the more youthful of the flock; and with more or less

whisperings, movements of the lips, and unconscious soliloquy among the older pupils. The master moved slowly up and down the aisle with a word of encouragement or explanation here and there, stopping with his hands behind him to gaze abstractedly out of the windows to the wondering envy of the little ones. A faint hum, as of invisible insects, gradually pervaded the school; the more persistent droning of a large bee had become dangerously soporific. The hot breath of the pines without had invaded the doors and windows; the warped shingles and weather-boarding at times creaked and snapped under the rays of the vertical and unclouded sun. A gentle perspiration broke out like a mild epidemic in the infant class; little curls became damp, brief lashes limp, round eyes moist, and small eyelids heavy. The master himself started, and awoke out of a perilous dream of other eyes and hair to collect himself severely. For the irresolute, half-embarrassed, half-lazy figure of a man had halted doubtingly before the porch and open door. Luckily the children, who were facing the master with their backs to the entrance, did not see it.

Yet the figure was neither alarming nor unfamiliar. The master at once recognized it as Ben Dabney, otherwise known as "Uncle Ben," a good-humored but not over-bright miner, who occupied a small cabin on an unambitious claim in the outskirts of Indian Spring. His avuncular title was evidently only an ironical tribute to his amiable incompetency and heavy good nature, for he was still a young man with no family ties, and by reason of his singular shyness not even a visitor in the few families of the neighborhood. As the master looked up, he had an irritating recollection that Ben had been already haunting him for the last two days, alternately appearing and disappearing in his path to and from school as a more than usually reserved and bashful ghost. This, to the master's cynical mind, clearly indicated that, like most ghosts, he had something of essentially sel-

fish import to communicate. Catching the apparition's half-appealing eye, he proceeded to exorcise it with a portentous frown and shake of the head, that caused it to timidly wane and fall away from the porch, only however to reappear and wax larger a few minutes later at one of the side windows. The infant class hailing his appearance as a heaven-sent boon, the master was obliged to walk to the door and command him sternly away, when, retreating to the fence, he mounted the uppermost rail, and drawing a knife from his pocket, cut a long splinter from the rail, and began to whittle it in patient and meditative silence. But when recess was declared, and the relieved feelings of the little flock had vent in the clearing around the schoolhouse, the few who rushed to the spot found that Uncle Ben had already disappeared. Whether the appearance of the children was too inconsistent with his ghostly mission, or whether his heart failed him at the last moment, the master could not determine. Yet, distasteful as the impending interview promised to be, the master was vaguely and irritatingly disappointed.

A few hours later, when school was being dismissed, the master found Octavia Dean lingering near his desk. Looking into the girl's mischievous eyes, he good humoredly answered their expectation by referring to her morning's news. "I thought Miss McKinstry had been married by this time," he said carelessly.

Octavia, swinging her satchel like a censer, as if she were performing some act of thurification over her completed tasks, replied demurely, "Oh no! dear no! — not *that*."

"So it would seem," said the master.

"I reckon she never kalkilated to, either," continued Octavia, slyly looking up from the corner of her lashes.

"Indeed!"

"No — she was just funning with Seth Davis — that's all."

"Funning with him?"

"Yes, sir. Kinder foolin' him, you know."

"Kinder foolin' him!"

For an instant the master felt it his professional duty to protest against this most unmaidenly and frivolous treatment of the matrimonial engagement, but a second glance at the significant face of his youthful auditor made him conclude that her instinctive knowledge of her own sex could be better trusted than his imperfect theories. He turned towards his desk without speaking. Octavia gave an extra swing to her satchel, tossing it over her shoulder with a certain small coquettishness and moved towards the door. As she did so the infant Filgee from the safe vantage of the porch where he had lingered was suddenly impelled to a crowning audacity! As if struck with an original idea, but apparently addressing himself to space, he cried out, "Crethy M'Kinthry likth teacher," and instantly vanished.

Putting these incidents sternly aside, the master addressed himself to the task of setting a few copies for the next day as the voices of his departing flock faded from the porch. Presently a silence fell upon the little schoolhouse. Through the open door a cool, restful breath stole gently as if nature were again stealthily taking possession of her own. A squirrel boldly came across the porch, a few twittering birds charging in stopped, beat the air hesitatingly for a moment with their wings, and fell back with bashfully protesting breasts aslant against the open door and the unlooked-for spectacle of the silent occupant. Then there was another movement of intrusion, but this time human, and the master looked up angrily to behold Uncle Ben.

He entered with a slow exasperating step, lifting his large boots very high and putting them down again softly as if he were afraid of some insecurity in the floor, or figuratively recognized the fact that the pathways of knowledge were thorny and difficult. Reaching the master's desk and the ministering presence above it, he stopped awkwardly,

and with the rim of his soft felt hat endeavored to wipe from his face the meek smile it had worn when he entered. It chanced also that he had halted before the minute stool of the infant Filgee, and his large figure instantly assumed such Brobdingnagian proportions in contrast that he became more embarrassed than ever. The master made no attempt to relieve him, but regarded him with cold interrogation.

"I reckoned," he began, leaning one hand on the master's desk with affected ease, as he dusted his leg with his hat with the other, — "I reckoned — that is — I allowed — I orter say — that I 'd find ye alone at this time. Ye gin-'rally are, ye know. It 's a nice, soothin', restful, stoodious time, when a man kin, so to speak, run back on his eddication and think of all he ever knowed. Ye 're jist like me, and ye see I sorter spotted your ways to onct."

"Then why did you come here this morning and disturb the school?" demanded the master sharply.

"That 's so, I sorter slipped up thar, did n't I?" said Uncle Ben, with a smile of rueful assent. "You see, I did n't allow to *come in* then, but on'y to hang round a leetle and kinder get used to it, and it to me."

"Used to what?" said the master impatiently, albeit with a slight softening at his intruder's penitent expression.

Uncle Ben did not reply immediately, but looked around as if for a seat, tried one or two benches and a desk with his large hand as if testing their security, and finally abandoning the idea as dangerous, seated himself on the raised platform beside the master's chair, having previously dusted it with the flap of his hat. Finding, however, that the attitude was not conducive to explanation, he presently rose again, and picking up one of the school-books from the master's desk eyed it unskillfully upside down, and then said hesitatingly: —

"I reckon ye ain't usin' Dobell's 'Rithmetic here?"

"No," said the master.

"That 's bad. 'Pears to be played out — that Dobell feller. I was brought up on Dobell. And Parsings' Grammar? Ye don't seem to be a-using Parsings' Grammar either?"

"No," said the master, relenting still more as he glanced at Uncle Ben's perplexed face with a faint smile.

"And I reckon you 'd be saying the same of Jones' 'Stronomy and Algebry? Things hev changed. You 've got all the new style here," he continued, with affected carelessness, but studiously avoiding the master's eye. "For a man ez wos brought up on Parsings, Dobell, and Jones, thar don't appear to be much show nowadays."

The master did not reply. Observing several shades of color chase each other on Uncle Ben's face, he bent his own gravely over his books. The act appeared to relieve his companion, who with his eyes still turned towards the window went on: —

"Ef you 'd had them books — which you have n't — I had it in my mind to ask you suthin'. I had an idea of — of — sort of reviewing my eddication. Kinder going over the old books agin — jist to pass the time. Sorter running in yer arter school hours and doin' a little practicin', eh? You looking on me as an extry scholar — and I payin' ye as sich — but keepin' it 'twixt ourselves, you know — just for a pastime, eh?" —

As the master smilingly raised his head, he became suddenly and ostentatiously attracted to the window.

"Them jay-birds out there is mighty peart, coming right up to the schoolhouse! I reckon they think it sort o' restful too."

"But if you really mean it, could n't you use these books, Uncle Ben?" said the master cheerfully. "I dare say there 's little difference — the principle is the same, you know."

Uncle Ben's face, which had suddenly brightened, as suddenly fell. He took the book from the master's hand without meeting his eyes, held it at arm's length, turned it over, and then laid it softly down upon the desk as if it were some excessively fragile article. "Certingly," he murmured, with assumed reflective ease. "Certingly. The principle 's all there." Nevertheless, he was quite breathless, and a few beads of perspiration stood out upon his smooth, blank forehead.

"And as to writing, for instance," continued the master with increasing heartiness as he took notice of these phenomena, "you know *any* copy-book will do."

He handed his pen carelessly to Uncle Ben. The large hand that took it timidly not only trembled, but grasped it with such fatal and hopeless unfamiliarity that the master was fain to walk to the window and observe the birds also.

"They 're mighty bold — them jays," said Uncle Ben, laying down the pen with scrupulous exactitude beside the book, and gazing at his fingers as if he had achieved a miracle of delicate manipulation. "They don't seem to be afeard of nothing, do they ?"

There was another pause. The master suddenly turned from the window. "I tell you what, Uncle Ben," he said, with prompt decision and unshaken gravity, "the only thing for you to do is to just throw over Dobell and Parsons and Jones and the old quill pen that I see you 're accustomed to, and start in fresh as if you 'd never known them. Forget 'em all, you know. It will be mighty hard of course to do that," he continued, looking out of the window, "but you must do it."

He turned back, the brightness that transfigured Uncle Ben's face at that moment brought a slight moisture into his own eyes. The humble seeker of knowledge said hurriedly that he would try.

"And begin again at the beginning," continued the

master cheerfully. "Exactly like one of those — in fact, as if you *really* were a child again."

"That's so," said Uncle Ben, rubbing his hands delightedly, "that's me! Why, that's jest what I was sayin' to Rupe" —

"Then you've already been talking about it?" intercepted the master in some surprise. "I thought you wanted it kept secret?"

"Well, yes," responded Uncle Ben dubiously. "But you see I sorter agreed with Rupe Filgee that if you took to my ideas and did n't object, I 'd give him two bits[1] every time he 'd kem here and help me of an arternoon when you was away and kinder stand guard around the schoolhouse, you know, so as to keep the fellows off. And Rupe's mighty sharp for a boy, ye know."

The master reflected a moment and concluded that Uncle Ben was probably right. Rupert Filgree, who was a handsome boy of fourteen, was also a strongly original character whose youthful cynicism and blunt, honest temper had always attracted him. He was a fair scholar, with a possibility of being a better one, and the proposed arrangement with Uncle Ben would not interfere with the discipline of school hours and might help them both. Nevertheless, he asked good humoredly, "But could n't you do this more securely and easily in your own house? I might lend you the books, you know, and come to you twice a week."

Uncle Ben's radiant face suddenly clouded. "It would n't be exactly the same kind o' game to me an' Rupe," he said hesitatingly. "You see, thar 's the idea o' the schoolhouse, ye know, and the restfulness and the quiet, and the gen'ral air o' study. And the boys around town ez would n't think nothin' o' traipsin' into my cabin if they spotted what I was up to thar, would never dream o' hunting me here."

"Very well," said the master, "let it be here then."

[1] Two bits, *i. e.*, twenty-five cents.

Observing that his companion seemed to be struggling with an inarticulate gratitude and an apparently inextricable buckskin purse in his pocket, he added quietly, "I 'll set you a few copies to commence with," and began to lay out a few unfinished examples of Master Johnny Filgee's scholastic achievements.

"After thanking *you*, Mr. Ford," said Uncle Ben faintly, "ef you 'll jest kinder signify, you know, what you consider a fair" —

Mr. Ford turned quickly and dexterously offered his hand to his companion in such a manner that he was obliged to withdraw his own from his pocket to grasp it in return. "You 're very welcome," said the master, "and as I can only permit this sort of thing gratuitously, you 'd better *not* let me know that you propose giving anything even to Rupert." He shook Uncle Ben's perplexed hand again, briefly explained what he had to do, and saying that he would now leave him alone a few minutes, he took his hat and walked towards the door.

"Then you reckon," said Uncle Ben slowly, regarding the work before him, "that I 'd better jest chuck them Dobell fellers overboard ?"

"I certainly should," responded the master, with infinite gravity.

"And sorter waltz in fresh, like one o' them children ?"

"Like a child," nodded the master as he left the porch.

A few moments later, as he was finishing his cigar in the clearing, he paused to glance in at the schoolroom window. Uncle Ben, stripped of his coat and waistcoat, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up on his powerful arms, had evidently cast Dobell and all misleading extraneous aid aside, and with the perspiration standing out on his foolish forehead, and his perplexed face close to the master's desk, was painfully groping along towards the light in the tottering and devious tracks of Master Johnny Filgee, like a very child indeed!

CHAPTER II

As the children were slowly straggling to their places the next morning, the master waited for an opportunity to speak to Rupert. That beautiful but scarcely amiable youth was, as usual, surrounded and impeded by a group of his small female admirers, for whom, it is but just to add, he had a supreme contempt. Possibly it was this healthy quality that inclined the master towards him, and it was consequently with some satisfaction that he overheard fragments of his openly disparaging comments upon his worshipers.

"There!" to Clarinda Jones, "don't flop! And don't *you*," to Octavia Dean, "go on breathing over my head like that. If there's anything I hate it's having a girl breathing round me. Yes, you were! I felt it in my hair. And *you* too — you're always snoopin' and snoodgin'. Oh yes, you want to know *why* I've got an extry copy-book and another 'Rithmetic, Miss Curiosity. Well, what would you give to know? Want to see if they're *pretty*" (with infinite scorn at the adjective). "No, they ain't *pretty*. That's all you girls think about — what's *pretty* and what's curious! Quit now! Come! Don't ye see teacher lookin' at you? Ain't you ashamed?"

He caught the master's beckoning eye and came forward, slightly abashed, with a flush of irritation still on his handsome face, and his chestnut curls slightly rumpled. One which Octavia had covertly accented by twisting round her forefinger, stood up like a crest on his head.

"I've told Uncle Ben that you might help him here after school hours," said the master, taking him aside.

"You may therefore omit your writing exercise in the morning and do it in the afternoon."

The boy's dark eyes sparkled. "And if it would be all the same to you, sir," he added earnestly, "you might sorter give out in school that I was to be kept in."

"I 'm afraid that would hardly do," said the master, much amused. "But why ? "

Rupert's color deepened. "So ez to keep them darned girls from foolin' round me and followin' me back here."

"We will attend to that," said the master, smiling ; a moment after he added more seriously, "I suppose your father knows that you are to receive money for this ? And he does n't object ? "

"He ! Oh no ! " returned Rupert, with a slight look of astonishment, and the same general suggestion of patronizing his progenitor that he had previously shown to his younger brother. "You need n't mind *him*." In reality Filgee *père*, a widower of two years' standing, had tacitly allowed the discipline of his family to devolve upon Rupert. Remembering this, the master could only say, "Very well," and good naturedly dismiss the pupil to his seat and the subject from his mind. The last laggard had just slipped in, the master had glanced over the occupied benches with his hand upon his warning bell, when there was a quick step on the gravel, a flutter of skirts like the sound of alighting birds, and a young woman lightly entered.

In the rounded, untouched, and untroubled freshness of her cheek and chin, and the forward droop of her slender neck, she appeared a girl of fifteen ; in her developed figure and the maturer drapery of her full skirts she seemed a woman ; in her combination of naïve recklessness and perfect understanding of her person she was both. In spite of a few school-books that jauntily swung from a strap in her gloved hand, she bore no resemblance to a pupil ; in her pretty gown of dotted muslin with bows of blue ribbon on

the skirt and corsage, and a cluster of roses in her belt, she was as inconsistent and incongruous to the others as a fashion-plate would have been in the dry and dog-eared pages before them. Yet she carried it off with a demure mingling of the *naïveté* of youth and the *aplomb* of a woman, and as she swept down the narrow aisle, burying a few small wondering heads in the overflow of her flounces, there was no doubt of her reception in the arch smile that dimpled her cheek. Dropping a half curtsy to the master, the only suggestion of her equality with the others, she took her place at one of the larger desks, and resting her elbow on the lid began to quietly remove her gloves. It was Cressy McKinstry.

Irritated and disturbed at the girl's unceremonious entrance, the master for the moment recognized her salutation coldly, and affected to ignore her elaborate appearance. The situation was embarrassing. He could not decline to receive her as she was no longer accompanied by her lover, nor could he plead entire ignorance of her broken engagement; while to point out the glaring inappropriateness of costume would be a fresh interference he knew Indian Spring would scarcely tolerate. He could only accept such explanation as she might choose to give. He rang his bell as much to avert the directed eyes of the children as to bring the scene to a climax.

She had removed her gloves and was standing up.

"I reckon I can go on where I left off?" she said lazily, pointing to the books she had brought with her.

"For the present," said the master dryly.

The first class was called. Later, when his duty brought him to her side, he was surprised to find that she was evidently already prepared with consecutive lessons, as if she were serenely unconscious of any doubt of her return, and as coolly as if she had only left school the day before. Her studies were still quite elementary, for Cressy McKin-

stry had never been a brilliant scholar, but he perceived, with a cynical doubt of its permanency, that she had bestowed unusual care upon her present performance. There was moreover a certain defiance in it, as if she had resolved to stop any objection to her return on the score of deficiencies. He was obliged in self-defense to take particular note of some rings she wore, and a large bracelet that ostentatiously glittered on her white arm — which had already attracted the attention of her companions, and prompted the audible comment from Johnny Filgee that it was "truly gold." Without meeting her eyes he contented himself with severely restraining the glances of the children that wandered in her direction. She had never been quite popular with the school in her previous rôle of *fiancée*, and only Octavia Dean and one or two older girls appreciated its mysterious fascination; while the beautiful Rupert, secure in his avowed predilection for the middle-aged wife of the proprietor of the Indian Spring hotel, looked upon her as a precocious chit with more than the usual propensity to objectionable "breathing." Nevertheless the master was irritatingly conscious of her presence — a presence which now had all the absurdity of her ridiculous love-experiences superadded to it. He tried to reason with himself that it was only a phase of frontier life, which ought to have amused him. But it did not. The intrusion of this preposterous girl seemed to disarrange the discipline of his life as well as of his school. The usual vague, far-off dreams in which he was in the habit of indulging during school hours, dreams that were perhaps superinduced by the remoteness of his retreat and a certain restful sympathy in his little auditors, which had made him — the grown-up dreamer — acceptable to them in his gentle understanding of their needs and weaknesses, now seemed to have vanished forever.

At recess, Octavia Dean, who had drawn near Cressy and reached up to place her arm round the older girl's waist,

glanced at her with a patronizing smile born of some rapid freemasonry, and laughingly retired with the others. The master at his desk and Cressy who had halted in the aisle were left alone.

"I have had no intimation yet from your father or mother that you were coming back to school again," he began. "But I suppose *they* have decided upon your return?"

An uneasy suspicion of some arrangement with her former lover had prompted the emphasis.

The young girl looked at him with languid astonishment. "I reckon paw and maw ain't no objection," she said, with the same easy ignoring of paternal authority that had characterized Rupert Filgee, and which seemed to be a local peculiarity. "Maw *did* offer to come yer and see you, but I told her she need n't bother."

She rested her two hands behind her on the edge of a desk, and leaned against it, looking down upon the toe of her smart little shoe, which was describing a small semicircle beyond the hem of her gown. Her attitude, which was half defiant, half indolent, brought out the pretty curves of her waist and shoulders. The master noticed it and became a trifle more austere.

"Then I am to understand that this is a permanent thing?" he asked coldly.

"What 's that?" said Cressy interrogatively.

"Am I to understand that you intend coming regularly to school?" repeated the master curtly, "or is this merely an arrangement for a few days — until" —

"Oh," said Cressy comprehendingly, lifting her unabashed blue eyes to his, "you mean *that*. Oh, *that 's* broke off. Yes," she added contemptuously, making a larger semicircle with her foot, "that 's over — three weeks ago."

"And Seth Davis — does *he* intend returning too?"

"He!" She broke into a light girlish laugh. "I reckon not much! S'long 's I 'm here, at least." She had just

lifted herself to a sitting posture on the desk, so that her little feet swung clear of the floor in their saucy dance. Suddenly she brought her heels together and alighted. "So that 's all?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Kin I go now?"

"Yes."

She laid her books one on the top of the other and lingered an instant.

"Been quite well?" she asked, with indolent politeness.

"Yes — thank you."

"You 're lookin' right peart."

She walked with a Southern girl's undulating languor to the door, opened it, then charged suddenly upon Octavia Dean, twirled her round in a wild waltz, and bore her away; appearing a moment after on the playground demurely walking with her arm around her companion's waist in an ostentatious confidence at once lofty, exclusive, and exasperating to the smaller children.

When school was dismissed that afternoon and the master had remained to show Rupert Filgee how to prepare Uncle Ben's tasks, and had given his final instructions to his youthful vicegerent, that irascible Adonis unburdened himself querulously: —

"Is Cressy McKinstry comin' reg'lar, Mr. Ford?"

"She is," said the master dryly. After a pause he asked, "Why?"

Rupert's curls had descended on his eyebrows in heavy discontent. "It 's mighty rough, jest ez a feller reckons he 's got quit of her and her jackass bo', to hev her prancin' back inter school agin, and rigged out like ez if she 'd been to a fire in a milliner's shop."

"You should n't allow your personal dislikes, Rupert, to provoke you to speak of a fellow scholar in that way — and a young lady too," corrected the master dryly.

"The woods is full o' sich feller scholars and sich young ladies, if yer keer to go a-gunning for 'em," said Rupert, with dark and slangy significance. "Ef I 'd known she was comin' back I 'd" — he stopped and brought his sunburnt fist against the seam of his trousers with a boyish gesture — "I 'd hev jist" —

"What ?" said the master sharply.

"I 'd hev played hookey till she left school agin ! It mout n't hev bin so long, neither," he added with a mysterious chuckle.

"That will do," said the master peremptorily. "For the present you 'll attend to your duty and try to make Uncle Ben see you 're something more than a foolish, prejudiced schoolboy, or," he added significantly, "he and I may both repent our agreement. Let me have a good account of you both when I return."

He took his hat from its peg on the wall, and in obedience to a suddenly formed resolution left the schoolroom to call upon the parents of Cressy McKinstry. He was not quite certain what he should say, but, after his habit, would trust to the inspiration of the moment. At the worst he could resign a situation that now appeared to require more tact and delicacy than seemed consistent with his position, and he was obliged to confess to himself that he had lately suspected that his present occupation — the temporary expedient of a poor but clever young man of twenty — was scarcely bringing him nearer a realization of his daily dreams. For Mr. Jack Ford was a youthful pilgrim who had sought his fortune in California so lightly equipped that even in the matter of kin and advisers he was deficient. That prospective fortune had already eluded him in San Francisco, had apparently not waited for him in Sacramento, and now seemed never to have been at Indian Spring. Nevertheless, when he was once out of sight of the schoolhouse he lit a cigar, put his hands in his pockets, and strode on

with the cheerfulness of that youth to which all things are possible.

The children had already dispersed as mysteriously and completely as they had arrived. Between him and the straggling hamlet of Indian Spring the landscape seemed to be without sound or motion. The wooded upland or ridge on which the schoolhouse stood, half a mile further on, began to slope gradually towards the river, on whose banks, seen from that distance, the town appeared to have been scattered irregularly or thrown together hastily, as if cast ashore by some overflow — the Cosmopolitan Hotel drifting into the Baptist church, and dragging in its tail of wreckage two saloons and a blacksmith's shop; while the County Court-house was stranded in solitary grandeur in a waste of gravel half a mile away. The intervening flat was still gashed and furrowed by the remorseless engines of earlier gold-seekers.

Mr. Ford was in little sympathy with this unsuccessful record of frontier endeavor — the fortune *he* had sought did not seem to lie in that direction — and his eye glanced quickly beyond it to the pine-crested hills across the river, whose primeval security was so near and yet so inviolable, or back again to the trail he was pursuing along the ridge. The latter prospect still retained its semi-savage character in spite of the occasional suburban cottages of residents, and the few outlying farms or ranches of the locality. The grounds of the cottages were yet uncleared of underbrush; bear and catamount still prowled around the rude fences of the ranches; the late alleged experience of the infant Snyder was by no means improbable or unprecedented.

A light breeze was seeking the heated flat and river, and thrilling the leaves around him with the strong vitality of the forest. The vibrating cross-lights and tremulous chequers of shade cast by the stirred foliage seemed to weave a fantastic net around him as he walked. The quaint odors

of certain woodland herbs known to his scholars, and religiously kept in their desks, or left like votive offerings on the threshold of the schoolhouse, recalled all the primitive simplicity and delicious wildness of the little temple he had left. Even in the mischievous glances of evasive squirrels and the moist eyes of the contemplative rabbits there were faint suggestions of some of his own truants. The woods were trembling with gentle memories of the independence he had always known here — of that sweet and grave retreat now so ridiculously invaded.

He began to hesitate, with one of those revulsions of sentiment characteristic of his nature: Why should he bother himself about this girl after all? Why not make up his mind to accept her as his predecessor had done? Why was it necessary for him to find her inconsistent with his ideas of duty to his little flock and his mission to them? Was he not assuming a sense of decorum that was open to misconception? The absurdity of her school costume, and any responsibility it incurred, rested not with him but with her parents. What right had he to point it out to them, and above all how was he to do it? He halted irresolutely at what he believed was his sober second thought, but which, like most reflections that take that flattering title, was only a reaction as impulsive and illogical as the emotion that preceded it.

Mr. McKinstry's "snake rail" fence was already discernible in the lighter opening of the woods, not far from where he had halted. As he stood there in hesitation, the pretty figure and bright gown of Cressy McKinstry suddenly emerged from a more secluded trail that intersected his own at an acute angle a few rods ahead of him. She was not alone, but was accompanied by a male figure whose arm she had evidently just dislodged from her waist. He was still trying to resume his lost vantage; she was as resolutely evading him with a certain nymph-like agility, while the

sound of her half-laughing, half-irate protest could be faintly heard. Without being able to identify the face or figure of her companion at that distance, he could see that it was *not* her former betrothed, Seth Davis.

A superior smile crossed his face ; he no longer hesitated, but at once resumed his former path. For some time Cressy and her companion moved on quietly before him. Then on reaching the rail-fence they turned abruptly to the right, were lost for an instant in the intervening thicket, and the next moment Cressy appeared alone, crossing the meadow in a shorter cut towards the house, having either scaled the fence or slipped through some familiar gap. Her companion had disappeared. Whether they had noticed that they were observed he could not determine. He kept steadily along the trail that followed the line of fence to the lane that led directly to the farm-building, and pushed open the front gate as Cressy's light dress vanished round an angle at the rear of the house.

The house of the McKinstrys rose, or rather stretched, itself before him, in all the lazy ungainliness of Southwestern architecture. A collection of temporary makeshifts, of boards, of logs, of canvas, prematurely decayed, and in some instances abandoned for a newer erection, or degraded to mere outhouses — it presented with singular frankness the nomadic and tentative disposition of its founder. It had been repaired without being improved ; its additions had seemed to extend its primitive ugliness over a larger space. Its roofs were roughly shingled or rudely boarded and battened, and the rafters of some of its "lean-to's" were simply covered with tarred canvas. As if to settle any doubt of the impossibility of this heterogeneous mass ever taking upon itself any picturesque combination, a small building of corrugated iron, transported in sections from some remoter locality, had been set up in its centre. The McKinstry ranch had long been an eyesore to the master

even that morning he had been mutely wondering from what convolution of that hideous chrysalis the bright butterfly Cressy had emerged. It was with a renewal of this curiosity that he had just seen her flutter back to it again.

A yellow dog, who had observed him hesitating in doubt where he should enter, here yawned, rose from the sunlight where he had been blinking, approached the master with languid politeness, and then turned towards the iron building as if showing him the way. Mr. Ford followed him cautiously, painfully conscious that his hypocritical canine introducer was only availing himself of an opportunity to gain ingress into the house, and was leading him as a responsible accomplice to probable exposure and disgrace. His expectation was quickly realized: a lazily querulous, feminine outcry, with the words, "Yer's that darned hound agin!" came from an adjacent room, and his exposed and abashed companion swiftly retreated past him into the road again. Mr. Ford found himself alone in a plainly furnished sitting-room confronting the open door leading to another apartment at which the figure of a woman, preceded hastily by a thrown dishcloth, had just appeared. It was Mrs. McKinstry; her sleeves were rolled up over her red but still shapely arms, and as she stood there wiping them on her apron, with her elbows advanced, and her closed hands raised alternately in the air, there was an odd pugilistic suggestion in her attitude. It was not lessened on her sudden discovery of the master by her retreating backwards with her hands up and her elbows still well forward as if warily retiring to an imaginary "corner."

Mr. Ford at once tactfully stepped back from the doorway. "I beg your pardon," he said, delicately addressing the opposite wall, "but I found the door open and I followed the dog."

"That's just one of his pizenous tricks," responded Mrs. McKinstry dolefully from within. "On'y last week he let

in a Chinaman, and in the nat'ral hustlin' that follered he managed to help himself outer the pork bar'l. There ain't no shade o' cussedness that or'nary hound ain't up to." Yet notwithstanding this ominous comparison she presently made her appearance with her sleeves turned down, her black woolen dress "tidied," and a smile of fatigued but not unkindly welcome and protection on her face. Dusting a chair with her apron and placing it before the master, she continued maternally, "Now that you're here, set ye right down and make yourself to home. My men folks are all out o' door, but some of 'em 's sure to happen in soon for suthin'; that day ain't yet created that they don't come huntin' up Mammy McKinstry every five minutes for this thing or that."

The glow of a certain hard pride burned through the careworn languor of her brown cheek. What she had said was strangely true. This rawboned woman before him, although scarcely middle-aged, had for years occupied a self-imposed maternal and protecting relation, not only to her husband and brothers, but to the three or four men, who as partners, or hired hands, lived at the ranch. An inherited and trained sympathy with what she called her "boys" and her "men folk," and their needs, had partly unsexed her. She was a fair type of a class not uncommon on the Southwestern frontier; women who were ruder helpmeets of their rude husbands and brothers, who had shared their privations and sufferings with surly, masculine endurance, rather than feminine patience; women who had sent their loved ones to hopeless adventure or terrible *vendetta* as a matter of course, or with partisan fury; who had devotedly nursed the wounded to keep alive the feud, or had received back their dead dry-eyed and revengeful. Small wonder that Cressy McKinstry had developed strangely under this sexless relationship. Looking at the mother, albeit not without a certain respect, Mr. Ford found himself con-

trasting her with the daughter's graceful femininity, and wondering where in Cressy's youthful contour the possibility of the grim figure before him was even now hidden.

"Hiram allowed to go over to the schoolhouse and see you this mornin'," said Mrs. McKinstry, after a pause; "but I reckon ez how he had to look up stock on the river. The cattle are that wild this time o' year, huntin' water, and hangin' round the *tules*, that my men are nigh worrited out o' their butes with 'em. Hank and Jim ain't been off their mustangs since sun-up, and Hiram, what with partrollen' the West Boundary all night, watchin' stakes whar them low down Harrisons hev been trespassin' — has n't put his feet to the ground in fourteen hours. Mebbee you noticed Hiram ez you kem along? Ef so, ye did n't remember what kind o' shootin' irons he had with him? I see his rifle over yon. Like ez not he 's only got his six-shooter, and them Harrisons are mean enough to lay for him at long range. But," she added, returning to a less important topic, "I s'pose Cressy came all right."

"Yes," said the master hopelessly.

"I reckon she looked so," continued Mrs. McKinstry, with tolerant abstraction. "She allowed to do herself credit in one of them new store gownds that she got at Sacramento. At least that 's what some of our men said. Late years, I ain't kept tech with the fashions myself." She passed her fingers explanatorily down the folds of her own coarse gown, but without regret or apology.

"She seemed well prepared in her lessons," said the master, abandoning for the moment that criticism of his pupil's dress, which he saw was utterly futile, "but am I to understand that she is coming regularly to school — that she is now perfectly free to give her entire attention to her studies — that — that — her — engagement is broken off?"

"Why, did n't she tell ye?" echoed Mrs. McKinstry in languid surprise.

"*She* certainly did," said the master, with slight embarrassment, "but" —

"Ef *she* said so," interrupted Mrs. McKinstry abstractedly, "she oughter know, and you kin tie to what she says."

"But as I 'm responsible to *parents* and not to scholars for the discipline of my school," returned the young man, a little stiffly, "I thought it my duty to hear it from *you*."

"That 's so," said Mrs. McKinstry meditatively; "then I reckon you 'd better see Hiram. That ar' Seth Davis engagement was a matter of hern and her father's, and not in *my* line. I s'pose that Hiram nat'rally allows to set the thing square to you and inquirin' friends."

"I hope you understand," said the master, slightly resenting the classification, "that my reason for inquiring about the permanency of your daughter's attendance was simply because it might be necessary to arrange her studies in a way more suitable to her years; perhaps even to suggest to you that a young ladies' seminary might be more satisfactory" —

"Sartain, sartain," interrupted Mrs. McKinstry hurriedly, but whether from evasion of annoying suggestion or weariness of the topic, the master could not determine. "You 'd better speak to Hiram about it. On'y," she hesitated slightly, "ez he 's got now sorter set and pinted towards your school, and is a trifle worrited with stock and them Harrisons, ye might tech it lightly. He oughter be along yer now. I can't think what keeps him." Her eye wandered again with troubled preoccupation to the corner where her husband's Sharps' rifle stood. Suddenly she raised her voice as if forgetful of Mr. Ford's presence.

"Oh, Cressy!"

"Oh, maw!"

The response came from the inner room. The next moment Cressy appeared at the door with an odd half-lazy defi-

ance in her manner, which the master could not understand except upon the hypothesis that she had been listening. She had already changed her elaborate toilet for a long, clinging, coarse blue gown, that accented the graceful curves of her slight, petticoatless figure. Nodding her head towards the master, she said, "Howdy?" and turned to her mother, who practically ignored their personal acquaintance. "Cressy," she said, "dad 's gone and left his Sharps' yer, d' ye mind takin' it along to meet him, afore he passes the Boundary corner? Ye might tell him the teacher 's yer, wantin' to see him."

"One moment," said the master, as the young girl carelessly stepped to the corner and lifted the weapon. "Let *me* take it. It 's all on my way back to school, and I 'll meet him."

Mrs. McKinstry looked perturbed. Cressy opened her clear eyes on the master with evident surprise. "No, Mr. Ford," said Mrs. McKinstry, with her former maternal manner. "Ye 'd better not mix yourself up with these yer doin 's. Ye 've no call to do it, and Cressy has; it 's all in the family. But it 's outer *your* line, and them Harrison whelps go to your school. Fancy the teacher takin' weppins betwixt and between!"

"It 's fitter work for the teacher than for one of his scholars, and a young lady at that," said Mr. Ford gravely, as he took the rifle from the hands of the half-amused, half-reluctant girl. "It 's quite safe with me, and I promise I shall deliver it into Mr. McKinstry's hands and none other."

"Perhaps it would n't be ez likely to be gin'rally noticed ez it would if one of *us* carried it," murmured Mrs. McKinstry in confidential abstraction, gazing at her daughter, sublimely unconscious of the presence of a third party.

"You 're quite right," said the master composedly, throwing the rifle over his shoulder and turning toward

the door. "So I'll say good-afternoon, and try and find your husband."

Mrs. McKinstry constrainedly plucked at the folds of her coarse gown. "Ye'll like a drink afore ye go," she said, in an ill-concealed tone of relief. "I clean forgot my manners. Cressy, fetch out that demijohn."

"Not for me, thank you," returned Mr. Ford, smiling.

"Oh, I see — you 're temperance, nat'rally," said Mrs. McKinstry, with a tolerant sigh.

"Hardly that," returned the master; "I follow no rule. I drink sometimes — but not to-day."

Mrs. McKinstry's dark face contracted. "Don't you see, maw," struck in Cressy quickly. "Teacher drinks sometimes, but he don't *use* whiskey. That 's all."

Her mother's face relaxed. Cressy slipped out of the door before the master, and preceded him to the gate. When she had reached it she turned and looked into his face.

"What did maw say to yer about seein' me just now?"

"I don't understand you."

"To your seein' me and Joe Masters on the trail?"

"She said nothing."

"Humph," said Cressy meditatively. "What was it you told her about it?"

"Nothing."

"Then you *did n't* see us?"

"I saw you with some one — I don't know whom."

"And you did n't tell maw?"

"I did not. It was none of my business."

He instantly saw the utter inconsistency of this speech in connection with the reason he believed he had in coming. But it was too late to recall it, and she was looking at him with a bright but singular expression.

"That Joe Masters is the conceitedest fellow goin'. I told him you could see his foolishness."

"Ah, indeed."

Mr. Ford pushed open the gate. As the girl still lingered, he was obliged to hold it a moment before passing through.

"Maw could n't quite hitch on to your not drinkin'. She reckons you 're like everybody else about yer. That 's where she slips up on you. And everybody else, I kalkilate."

"I suppose she 's somewhat anxious about your father, and I dare say is expecting me to hurry," returned the master pointedly.

"Oh, dad 's all right," said Cressy mischievously; "you 'll come across him over yon, in the clearing. But you 're looking right purty with that gun. It kinder sets you off. You oughter wear one."

The master smiled slightly, said "Good-by," and took leave of the girl, but not of her eyes, which were still following him. Even when he had reached the end of the lane and glanced back at the rambling dwelling, she was still leaning on the gate with one foot on the lower rail and her chin cupped in the hollow of her hand. She made a slight gesture, not clearly intelligible at that distance; it might have been a mischievous imitation of the way he had thrown the gun over his shoulder, it might have been a wafted kiss.

The master, however, continued his way in no very self-satisfied mood. Although he did not regret having taken the place of Cressy as the purveyor of lethal weapons between the belligerent parties, he knew he was tacitly mingling in the feud between people for whom he cared little or nothing. It was true that the Harrisons sent their children to his school, and that in the fierce partisanship of the locality this simple courtesy was open to misconstruction. But he was more uneasily conscious that this mission, so far as Mrs. McKinstry was concerned, was a miserable fail-

ure. The strange relations of the mother and daughter perhaps explained much of the girl's conduct, but it offered no hope of future amelioration. Would the father, "worrited by stock" and boundary quarrels — a man in the habit of cutting Gordian knots with a bowie-knife — prove more reasonable? Was there any nearer sympathy between father and daughter? But she had said he would meet McKinstry in the clearing: she was right, for here he was, coming forward at a gallop!

CHAPTER III

When within a dozen paces of the master, McKinstry, scarcely checking his mustang, threw himself from the saddle, and with a sharp cut of his riata on the animal's haunches sent him still galloping towards the distant house. Then, with both hands deeply thrust in the side pockets of his long, loose linen coat, he slowly lounged with clanking spurs towards the young man. He was thick-set, of medium height, densely and reddishly bearded, with heavy-lidded pale blue eyes that wore a look of drowsy pain, and after their first wearied glance at the master seemed to rest anywhere but on him.

"Your wife was sending you your rifle by Cressy," said the master, "but I offered to bring it myself, as I thought it scarcely a proper errand for a young lady. Here it is. I hope you did n't miss it before and don't require it now," he added quietly.

Mr. McKinstry took it in one hand with an air of slightly embarrassed surprise, rested it against his shoulder, and then with the same hand, and without removing the other from his pocket, took off his soft felt hat, showed a bullet-hole in its rim, and returned lazily, "It 's about half an hour late, but them Harrisons reckoned I was fixed for 'em and war too narvous to draw a clear bead on me."

The moment was evidently not a felicitous one for the master's purpose, but he was determined to go on. He hesitated an instant, when his companion, who seemed to be equally but more sluggishly embarrassed, in a moment of preoccupied perplexity withdrew from his pocket his

right hand swathed in a blood-stained bandage, and following some instinctive habit, attempted, as if reflectively, to scratch his head with two stiffened fingers.

"You are hurt," said the master, genuinely shocked, "and here I am detaining you."

"I had my hand up — so," explained McKinstry, with heavy deliberation, "and the ball raked off my little finger after it went through my hat. But that ain't what I wanted to say when I stopped ye. I ain't just kam enough yet," he apologized in the calmest manner, "and I clean forgit myself," he added, with perfect self-possession. "But I was kalkilatin' to ask you" — he laid his bandaged hand familiarly on the master's shoulder — "if Cressy kem all right?"

"Perfectly," said the master. "But sha'n't I walk on home with you, and we can talk together after your wound is attended to?"

"And she looked purty?" continued McKinstry, without moving.

"Very."

"And you thought them new store gownds of hers right peart?"

"Yes," said the master. "Perhaps a little too fine for the school, you know," he added insinuatingly, "and" —

"Not for her — not for her," interrupted McKinstry. "I reckon thar's more whar that cam from! Ye need n't fear but that she kin keep up that gait ez long ez Hiram McKinstry hez the runnin' of her."

Mr. Ford gazed hopelessly at the hideous ranch in the distance, at the sky, and the trail before him; then his glance fell upon the hand still upon his shoulder, and he struggled with a final effort. "At another time I'd like to have a long talk with you about your daughter, Mr. McKinstry."

"Talk on," said McKinstry, putting his wounded hand through the master's arm. "I admire to hear you. You're that kam, it does me good."

Nevertheless the master was conscious that his own arm was scarcely as firm as his companion's. It was, however, useless to draw back now, and with as much tact as he could command he relieved his mind of its purpose. Addressing the obtruding bandage before him, he dwelt upon Cressy's previous attitude in the school, the danger of any relapse, the necessity of her having a more clearly defined position as a scholar, and even the advisability of her being transferred to a more advanced school with a more mature teacher of her own sex. "This is what I wished to say to Mrs. McKinstry to-day," he concluded, "but she referred me to you."

"In course, in course," said McKinstry, nodding complacently. "She 's a good woman in and around the ranch, and in any doin's o' this kind," he lightly waved his wounded arm in the air, "there ain't a better, though I say it. She was Blair Rawlins' darter; she and her brother Clay bein' the only ones that kem out safe arter their twenty years' fight with the McEntees in West Kaintuck. But she don't understand gals ez you and me do. Not that I 'm much, ez I orter be more kam. And the old woman jest sized the hull thing when she said *she* had n't any hand in Cressy's engagement. No more she had! And ez far ez that goes, no more did me, nor Seth Davis, nor Cressy." He paused, and lifting his heavy-lidded eyes to the master for the second time, said reflectively, "Ye must n't mind my tellin' ye — ez betwixt man and man — that *the* one ez is most responsible for the makin' and breakin' o' that engagement is *you!*"

"Me!" said the master in utter bewilderment.

"You!" repeated McKinstry quietly, reinstalling the hand Ford had attempted to withdraw. "I ain't sayin' ye either knowed it or kalkilated on it. But it war so. Ef ye 'd hark to me, and meander on a little, I 'll tell ye *how* it war. I don't mind walkin' a piece *your* way, for if we

go towards the ranch, and the hounds see me, they 'll set up a racket and bring out the old woman, and then good-by to any confidential talk betwixt you and me. And I 'm, somehow, kammer out yer."

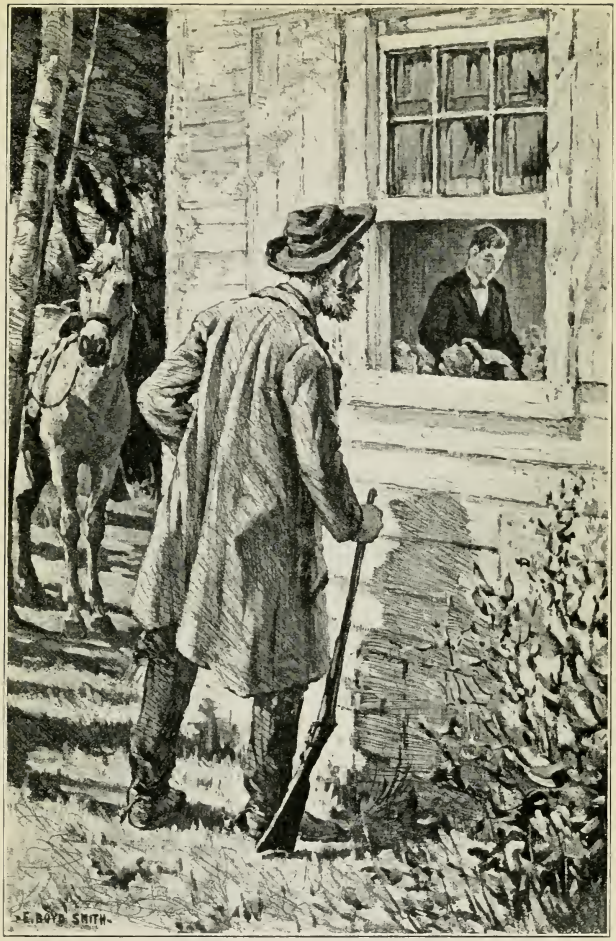
He moved slowly down the trail, still holding Ford's arm confidentially, although, owing to his large protecting manner, he seemed to offer a ridiculous suggestion of supporting *him* with his wounded member.

"When you first kem to Injin Spring," he began, "Seth and Cressy was goin' to school, boy and girl like, and nothin' more. They 'd known each other from babies — the Davises bein' our neighbors in Kaintuck, and emigraten' with us from St. Joe. Seth mout hev cottoned to Cress, and Cress to him, in course o' time, and there was n't anythin' betwixt the families to hev kept 'em from marryin' when they wanted. But there never war any words passed, and no engagement."

"But," interrupted Ford hastily, "my predecessor, Mr. Martin, distinctly told me that there was, and that it was with *your* permission."

"That 's only because you noticed suthin' the first day you looked over the school with Martin. 'Dad,' sez Cress to me, 'that new teacher 's very peart; and he 's that keen about noticin' me and Seth that I reckon you 'd better give out that we 're engaged.' 'But are you?' sez I. 'It 'll come to that in the end,' sez Cress, 'and if that yer teacher hez come here with Northern ideas o' society, it 's just ez well to let him see Injin Spring ain't entirely in the woods about them things either.' So I agreed, and Martin told you it was all right; Cress and Seth was an engaged couple, and you was to take no notice. And then *you* ups and objects to the hull thing, and allows that courtin' in school, even among engaged pupils, ain't proper."

The master turned his eyes with some uneasiness to the face of Cressy's father. It was heavy but impassive.



I PEEPED INTER THE WINDER

"I don't mind tellin' you, now that it's over, what happened. The trouble with me, Mr. Ford, is — I ain't kam! and *you* air, and that's what got me. For when I heard what you'd said, I got on that mustang and started for the schoolhouse to clean you out and give you five minutes to leave Injin Spring. I don't know ez you remember that day. I'd kalkilated my time so ez to ketch ye comin' out o' school, but I was too airly. I hung around out o' sight, and then hitched my hoss to a buckeye and peeped inter the winder to hev a good look at ye. It was very quiet and kam. There was squirrels over the roof, yellow-jackets and bees dronin' away, and kinder sleeping-like all around in the air, and jay-birds twitterin' in the shingles, and they never minded me. You were movin' up and down among them little gals and boys, liftin' up their heads and talkin' to 'em softly and quiet-like, ez if you was one of them yourself. And they looked contented and kam. And onct — I don't know if *you* remember it — you kem close up to the winder with your hands behind you, and looked out so kam and quiet and so far off, ez if everybody else outside the school was miles away from you. It kem to me then that I'd given a heap to hev had the old woman see you thar. It kem to me, Mr. Ford, that there was n't any place for *me* thar; and it kem to me, too — and a little rough-like — that mebbee there was n't any place there for *my* Cress either! So I rode away without disturbin' you nor the birds nor the squirrels. Talkin' with Cress that night, she said ez how it was a fair sample of what happened every day, and that you'd always treated her fair like the others. So she allowed that she'd go down to Sacramento, and get some things agin her and Seth bein' married next month, and she reckoned she would n't trouble you nor the school agin. Hark till I've done, Mr. Ford," he continued, as the young man made a slight movement of deprecation. "Well, I agreed. But arter she got to Sacramento and

bought some fancy fixin's, she wrote to me and sez ez how she 'd been thinkin' the hull thing over, and she reckoned that she and Seth were too young to marry, and the engagement had better be broke. And I broke it for her."

"But how?" asked the bewildered master.

"Gin'rally with this gun," returned McKinstry, with slow gravity, indicating the rifle he was carrying, "for I ain't kam. I let on to Seth's father that if I ever found Seth and Cressy together again, I 'd shoot him. It made a sort o' coolness betwixt the families, and hez given some comfort to them low-down Harrisons; but even the law, I reckon, recognizes a father's rights. And ez Cress sez, now ez Seth's out o' the way, thar ain't no reason why she can't go back to school and finish her eddication. And I reckoned she was right. And we both agreed that ez she 'd left school to git them store clothes, it was only fair that she 'd give the school the benefit of 'em."

The case seemed more hopeless than ever. The master knew that the man beside him might hardly prove as lenient to a second objection at his hand. But that very reason, perhaps, impelled him, now that he knew his danger, to consider it more strongly as a duty, and his pride revolted from a possible threat underlying McKinstry's confidences. Nevertheless he began gently: —

"But you are quite sure you won't regret that you did n't avail yourself of this broken engagement, and your daughter's outfit — to send her to some larger boarding-school in Sacramento or San Francisco? Don't you think she may find it dull, and soon tire of the company of mere children when she has already known the excitement of" — he was about to say "a lover," but checked himself, and added, "a young girl's freedom?"

"Mr. Ford," returned McKinstry, with the slow and fatuous misconception of a one-idea'd man, "when I said just now that, lookin' inter that kam, peaceful school of

yours, I did n't find a place for Cress, it warn't because I did n't think she *oughter* hev a place thar. Thar was that thar wot she never had ez a little girl with me and the old woman, and that she could n't find ez a grownd-up girl in any boarding-school — the home of a child; that kind o' innocent foolishness that I sometimes reckon must hev slipped outer our emigrant wagon comin' across the plains, or got left behind at St. Joe. She was a grownd girl fit to marry afore she was a child. She had young fellers a-sparkin' her afore she ever played with 'em ez boy and girl. I don't mind tellin' you that it wern't in the natur of Blair Rawlins' darter to teach her own darter any better, for all she 's been a mighty help to me. So if it 's all the same to you, Mr. Ford, we won't talk about a grownd-up school; I 'd rather Cress be a little girl again among them other children. I should be a powerful sight more kam if I knowed that when I was away huntin' stock or fightin' stakes with them Harrisons, that she was a-settin' there with them and the birds and the bees, and listenin' to them and to you. Mebbee there 's been a little too many scrimmages goin' on round the ranch sence she 's been a child; mebbee she orter know suthin' more of a man than a feller who sparks her and fights for her."

The master was silent. Had this dull, narrow-minded partisan stumbled upon a truth that had never dawned upon his own broader comprehension? Had this selfish savage and literally red-handed frontier brawler been moved by some dumb instinct of the power of gentleness to understand his daughter's needs better than he? For a moment he was staggered. Then he thought of Cressy's later flirtations with Joe Masters, and her concealment of their meeting from her mother. Had she deceived her father also? Or was not the father deceiving him with this alternate suggestion of threat and of kindliness — of power and weakness. He had heard of this cruel phase of Southwestern cunning

before. With the feeble sophistry of the cynic he mistrusted the good his skepticism could not understand. Howbeit, glancing sideways at the slumbering savagery of the man beside him, and his wounded hand, he did not care to show his lack of confidence. He contented himself with that equally feeble resource of weak humanity in such cases — good-natured indifference. "All right," he said carelessly; "I'll see what can be done. But are you quite sure you are fit to go home alone? Shall I accompany you?" As McKinstry waived the suggestion with a gesture, he added lightly, as if to conclude the interview, "I'll report progress to you from time to time, if you like."

"To *me*," emphasized McKinstry; "not over *thar*," indicating the ranch. "But p'rhaps *you* would n't mind my ridin' by and lookin' in at the schoolroom winder onct in a while? Ah — you *would*," he added, with the first deepening of color he had shown. "Well, never mind."

"You see it might distract the children from their lessons," explained the master gently, who had however contemplated with some concern the infinite delight which a glimpse of McKinstry's fiery and fatuous face at the window would awake in Johnny Filgee's infant breast.

"Well, no matter!" returned McKinstry slowly. "Ye don't keer, I s'pose, to come over to the hotel and take suthin'? A julep or a smash?"

"I should n't think of keeping you a moment longer from Mrs. McKinstry," said the master, looking at his companion's wounded hand. "Thank you all the same. Good-by."

They shook hands, McKinstry transferring his rifle to the hollow of his elbow to offer his unwounded left. The master watched him slowly resume his way towards the ranch. Then with a half-uneasy and half-pleasurable sense that he had taken some step whose consequences were more

important than he would at present understand, he turned in the opposite direction to the schoolhouse. He was so preoccupied that it was not until he had nearly reached it that he remembered Uncle Ben. With an odd recollection of McKinstry's previous performance, he approached the school from the thicket in the rear and slipped noiselessly to the open window with the intention of looking in. But the schoolhouse, far from exhibiting that "kam" and studious abstraction which had so touched the savage breast of McKinstry, was filled with the accents of youthful and unrestrained vituperation. The voice of Rupert Filgee came sharply to the master's astonished ears.

"You need n't try to play off Dobell or Mitchell on *me* — you hear! Much *you* know of either, don't you? Look at that copy. If Johnny could n't do better than that, I 'd lick him. Of course it 's the pen — it ain't your stodgy fingers — oh no! P'r'aps you 'd like to hev a few more boxes o' quills and gold pens and Gillott's best thrown in, for two bits a lesson? I tell you what! I 'll throw up the contract in another minit! There goes another quill busted! Look here, what *you* want ain't a pen, but a clothes-pin and a split nail! That 'll about jibe with your dilikit gait."

The master at once stepped to the window and, unobserved, took a quick survey of the interior. Following some ingenious idea of his own regarding fitness, the beautiful Filgee had induced Uncle Ben to seat himself on the floor before one of the smallest desks, presumably his brother's, in an attitude which, while it certainly gave him considerable elbow-room for those contortions common to immature penmanship, offered his youthful instructor a superior eminence, from which he hovered, occasionally swooping down upon his grown-up pupil like a mischievous but graceful jay. But Mr. Ford's most distinct impression was that, far from resenting the derogatory position and the abuse that

accompanied it, Uncle Ben not only beamed upon his persecutor with unquenchable good humor, but with undisguised admiration, and showed not the least inclination to accept his proposed resignation.

"Go slow, Rupe," he said cheerfully. "You was onct a boy yourself. Nat'rally I kalkilate to stand all the damages. You 've got ter waste some powder over a blast like this yer, way down to the bed rock. Next time I 'll bring my own pens."

"Do. Some from the Dobell school you uster go to," suggested the darkly ironical Rupert. "They was iron-clad injin-rubber, warn't they ?"

"Never you mind wot they were," said Uncle Ben good humoredly. "Look at that string of 'C's' in that line. There 's nothing mean about *them*."

He put his pen between his teeth, raised himself slowly on his legs, and shading his eyes with his hand from the severe perspective of six feet, gazed admiringly down upon his work. Rupert, with his hands in his pockets and his back to the window, cynically assisted at the inspection.

"Wot 's that sick worm at the bottom of the page ?" he asked.

"Wot might you think it wos ?" said Uncle Ben beamingly.

"Looks like one o' them snakeroots you dig up with a little mud stuck to it," returned Rupert critically.

"That 's my name."

They both stood looking at it with their heads very much on one side. "It ain't so bad as the rest you 've done. It *might* be your name. That ez, it don't look like anythin' else," suggested Rupert, struck with a new idea that it was perhaps more professional occasionally to encourage his pupil. "You might get on in course o' time. But what are you doin' all this for ?" he asked suddenly.

"Doin' what ?"

"This yer comin' to school when you ain't sent, and you ain't got no call to go — you, a grown-up man!"

The color deepened in Uncle Ben's face to the back of his ears. "Wot would you give to know, Rupe? S'pose I reckoned some day to make a strike and sorter drop inter saciety easy — eh? S'pose I wanted to be ready to keep up my end with the other fellers, when the time kem? To be able to sling po'try and read novels and sich — eh?"

An expression of infinite and unutterable scorn dawned in the eyes of Rupert. "You do? Well," he repeated, with slow and cutting deliberation, "I'll tell you what you 're comin' here for, and the only thing that makes you come!"

"What?"

"It 's — some — girl!"

Uncle Ben broke into a boisterous laugh that made the roof shake, stamping about and slapping his legs till the crazy floor trembled. But at that moment the master stepped to the porch and made a quiet but discomposing entrance.

CHAPTER IV

The return of Miss Cressida McKinstry to Indian Spring and her interrupted studies was an event whose effects were not entirely confined to the school. The broken engagement itself seemed of little moment in the general estimation compared to her resumption of her old footing as a scholar. A few ill-natured elders of her own sex, and naturally exempt from the discriminating retort of Mr. McKinstry's "shot-gun," alleged that the Seminary at Sacramento had declined to receive her, but the majority accepted her return with local pride as a practical compliment to the educational facilities of Indian Spring. The Tuolumne "Star," with a breadth and eloquence touchingly disproportionate to its actual size and quality of type and paper, referred to the possible "growth of a grove of Academus at Indian Spring, under whose cloistered boughs future sages and statesmen were now meditating," in a way that made the master feel exceedingly uncomfortable. For some days the trail between the McKinstrys' ranch and the schoolhouse was lightly patrolled by reliefs of susceptible young men, to whom the enfranchised Cressida, relieved from the dangerous supervision of the Davis-McKinstry clique, was an object of ambitious admiration. The young girl herself, who, in spite of the master's annoyance, seemed to be following some conscientious duty in consecutively arraying herself in the different dresses she had bought, however she may have tantalized her admirers by this revelation of bridal finery, did not venture to bring them near the limits of the playground. It struck the master with some sur-

prise that Indian Spring did not seem to trouble itself in regard to his own privileged relations with its rustic enchantress; the young men clearly were not jealous of him; no matron had suggested any indecorum in a young girl of Cressy's years and antecedents being intrusted to the teachings of a young man scarcely her senior. Notwithstanding the attitude which Mr. Ford had been pleased to assume towards her, this implied compliment to his supposed monastic vocations affected him almost as uncomfortably as the "Star's" extravagant eulogium. He was obliged to recall certain foolish experiences of his own to enable him to rise superior to this presumption of his asceticism.

In pursuance of his promise to McKinstry, he had procured a few elementary books of study suitable to Cressy's new position, without, however, taking her out of the smaller classes or the discipline of the school. In a few weeks he was enabled to further improve her attitude by making her a "monitor" over the smaller girls, thereby dividing certain functions with Rupert Filgee, whose ministrations to the deceitful and "silly" sex had been characterized by perhaps more vigilant scorn and disparagement than was necessary. Cressy had accepted it as she had accepted her new studies, with an indolent good humor, and at times a frankly supreme ignorance of their abstract or moral purpose that was discouraging. "What 's the good of that?" she would ask, lifting her eyes abruptly to the master. Mr. Ford, somewhat embarrassed by her look, which always, sooner or later, frankly confessed itself an excuse for a perfectly irrelevant examination of his features in detail, would end in giving her some severely practical answer. Yet, if the subject appealed to any particular idiosyncrasy of her own, she would speedily master the study. A passing predilection for botany was provoked by a single incident. The master, deeming this study a harmless young-ladylike

occupation, had one day introduced the topic at recess, and was met by the usual answer. "But suppose," he continued artfully, "somebody sent you anonymously some flowers?"

"Her bo!" suggested Johnny Filgee hoarsely, with bold bad recklessness. Ignoring the remark and the kick with which Rupert had resented it on the person of his brother, the master continued: —

"And if you could n't find out who sent them, you would want at least to know what they were and where they grew."

"Ef they grew anywhere 'bout yer we could tell her that," said a chorus of small voices.

The master hesitated. He was conscious of being on delicate ground. He was surrounded by a dozen pairs of little keen eyes from whom Nature had never yet succeeded in hiding her secrets — eyes that had waited for and knew the coming up of the earliest flowers; little fingers that had never turned the pages of a text-book, but knew where to scrape away the dead leaves above the first anemone, or had groped painfully among the lifeless branches in forgotten hollows for the shy dog-rose; unguided little feet that had instinctively made their way to remote southern slopes for the first mariposas, or had unerringly threaded the tule-hidden banks of the river for flower-de-luce. Convinced that he could not hold his own on their level, he shamelessly struck at once above it.

"Suppose that one of those flowers," he continued, "was not like the rest; that its stalks and leaves, instead of being green and soft, were white and stringy like flannel as if to protect it from cold, would n't it be nice to be able to say at once that it had lived only in the snow, and that some one must have gone all that way up there above the snow line to pick it?" The children, taken aback by this unfair introduction of a floral stranger, were silent. Cressy

thoughtfully accepted botany on those possibilities. A week later she laid on the master's desk a limp-looking plant with a stalk like heavy frayed worsted yarn. "It ain't much to look at after all, is it?" she said. "I reckon I could cut a better one with scissors outer an old cloth jacket of mine."

"And you found it here?" asked the master in surprise.

"I got Masters to look for it when he was on the Summit. I described it to him. I did n't allow he had the gumption to get it. But he did."

Although botany languished slightly after this vicarious effort, it kept Cressy in fresh bouquets, and extending its gentle influence to her friends and acquaintances became slightly confounded with horticulture, led to the planting of one or two gardens, and was accepted in school as an implied concession to berries, apples, and nuts. In reading and writing Cressy greatly improved, with a marked decrease in grammatical solecisms, although she still retained certain characteristic words, and always her own slow Southwestern, half-musical intonation. This languid deliberation was particularly noticeable in her reading aloud, and gave the studied and measured rhetoric a charm of which her careless colloquial speech was incapable. Even the "Fifth Reader," with its imposing passages from the English classics carefully selected with a view of paralyzing small, hesitating, or hurried voices, in Cressy's hands became no longer an unintelligible incantation. She had quietly mastered the difficulties of pronunciation by some instinctive sense of euphony if not of comprehension. The master with his eyes closed hardly recognized his pupil. Whether or not she understood what she read he hesitated to inquire; no doubt, as with her other studies, she knew what attracted her. Rupert Filgee, a sympathetic if not always a correct reader, who boldly took four and five syllabled fences flying only

to come to grief perhaps in the ditch of some rhetorical pause beyond, alone expressed his scorn of her performance. Octavia Dean, torn between her hopeless affection for this beautiful but inaccessible boy and her soul-friendship for this bigger but many-frocked girl, studied the master's face with watchful anxiety.

It is needless to say that Hiram McKinstry was, in the intervals of stake-driving and stock-hunting, heavily contented with this latest evidence of his daughter's progress. He even intimated to the master that her reading being an accomplishment that could be exercised at home was conducive to that "kam" in which he was so deficient. It was also rumored that Cressy's oral rendering of Addison's "Reflections in Westminster Abbey" and Burke's "Indictment of Warren Hastings," had beguiled him one evening from improving an opportunity to "plug" one of Harrison's boundary "raiders."

The master shared in Cressy's glory in the public eye. But although Mrs. McKinstry did not materially change her attitude of tolerant good nature towards him, he was painfully conscious that she looked upon her daughter's studies and her husband's interest in them as weaknesses that might in course of time produce infirmity of homicidal purpose and become enervating of eye and trigger-finger. And when Mr. McKinstry got himself appointed as school trustee, and was thereby obliged to mingle with certain Eastern settlers, — colleagues on the Board, — this possible weakening of the old sharply drawn sectional line between "Yanks" and themselves gave her grave doubts of Hiram's physical stamina.

"The old man's worrits hev sorter shook out a little of his sand," she had explained. On those evenings when he attended the Board, she sought higher consolation in prayer-meeting at the Southern Baptist Church, in whose exercises her Northern and Eastern neighbors, thinly disguised as

"Baal" and "Astaroth," were generally overthrown and their temples made desolate.

If Uncle Ben's progress was slower, it was no less satisfactory. Without imagination and even without enthusiasm, he kept on with a dull laborious persistency. When the irascible impatience of Rupert Filgee at last succumbed to the obdurate slowness of his pupil, the master himself, touched by Uncle Ben's perspiring forehead and perplexed eyebrows, often devoted the rest of the afternoon to a gentle elucidation of the mysteries before him, setting copies for his heavy hand, or even guiding it with his own, like a child's, across the paper. At times the appalling uselessness of Uncle Ben's endeavors reminded him of Rupert's taunting charge. Was he really doing this from a genuine thirst for knowledge? It was inconsistent with all that Indian Spring knew of his antecedents and his present ambitions; he was a simple miner without scientific or technical knowledge; his already slight acquaintance with arithmetic and the scrawl that served for his signature were more than sufficient for his needs. Yet it was with this latter sign-manual that he seemed to take infinite pains. The master, one afternoon, thought fit to correct the apparent vanity of this performance.

"If you took as much care in trying to form your letters according to copy, you'd do better. Your signature is fair enough as it is."

"But it don't look right, Mr. Ford," said Uncle Ben, eying it distrustfully; "somehow it ain't all there."

"Why, certainly it is. Look, D A B N E Y — not very plain, it's true, but there are all the letters."

"That's just it, Mr. Ford; them *ain't* all the letters that *orter* be there. I've allowed to write it D A B N E Y to save time and ink, but it orter read D A U B I G N Y," said Uncle Ben, with painful distinctness.

"But that spells d'Aubigny!"

"It are."

"Is that your name?"

"I reckon."

The master looked at Uncle Ben doubtfully. Was this only another form of the Dobell illusion? "Was your father a Frenchman?" he asked finally.

Uncle Ben paused as if to recall the trifling circumstances of his father's nationality. "No."

"Your grandfather?"

"I reckon not. At least ye could n't prove it by me."

"Was your father or grandfather a voyageur or trapper, or Canadian?"

"They were from Pike County, Mizzoori."

The master regarded Uncle Ben still dubiously. "But you call yourself Dabney. What makes you think your real name is d'Aubigny?"

"That 's the way it uster be writ in letters to me in the States. Hold on. I 'll show ye." He deliberately began to feel in his pockets, finally extracting his old purse from which he produced a crumpled envelope, and carefully smoothing it out, compared it with his signature.

"Thar, you see. It 's the same — d'Aubigny."

The master hesitated. After all, it was not impossible. He recalled other instances of the singular transformation of names in the Californian emigration. Yet he could not help saying, "Then you concluded d'Aubigny was a better name than Dabney?"

"Do *you* think it 's better?"

"Women might. I dare say your wife would prefer to be called Mrs. d'Aubigny rather than Dabney."

The chance shot told. Uncle Ben suddenly flushed to his ears.

"I did n't think o' that," he said hurriedly. "I had another idee. I reckoned that on the matter o' holdin' property and passin' in money it would be better to hev

your name put on the square, and to sorter go down to bedrock for it, eh? If I wanted to take a hand in them lots or Ditch shares, for instance — it would be only law to hev it made out in the name o' d'Aubigny."

Mr. Ford listened with a certain impatient contempt. It was bad enough for Uncle Ben to have exposed his weakness in inventing fictions about his early education, but to invest himself now with a contingency of capital for the sake of another childish vanity was pitiable as it was preposterous. There was no doubt that he had lied about his school experiences; it was barely probable that his name was really d'Aubigny, and it was quite consistent with all this — even setting apart the fact that he was perfectly well known to be only a poor miner — that he should lie again. Like most logical reasoners Mr. Ford forgot that humanity might be illogical and inconsistent without being insincere. He turned away without speaking as if indicating a wish to hear no more.

"Some o' these days," said Uncle Ben, with dull persistency "I 'll tell ye suthin'."

"I 'd advise you just now to drop it and stick to your lessons," said the master sharply.

"That 's so," said Uncle Ben hurriedly, hiding himself as it were in an all-encompassing blush. "In course lessons first, boys, that 's the motto." He again took up his pen and assumed his old laborious attitude. But after a few moments it became evident that either the master's curt dismissal of his subject or his own preoccupation with it had somewhat unsettled him. He cleaned his pen obtrusively, going to the window for a better light, and whistling from time to time with a demonstrative carelessness and a depressing gayety. He once broke into a murmuring, meditative chant evidently referring to the previous conversation, in its — "That 's so — Yer we go — Lessons the first, boys, Yo, heave O." The rollicking marine character of this

refrain, despite its utter incongruousness, apparently struck him favorably, for he repeated it softly, occasionally glancing behind him at the master who was coldly absorbed at his desk. Presently he arose, carefully put his books away, symmetrically piling them in a pyramid beside Mr. Ford's motionless elbow, and then lifting his feet with high but gentle steps went to the peg where his coat and hat were hanging. As he was about to put them on he appeared suddenly struck with a sense of indecorousness in dressing himself in the school, and taking them on his arm to the porch resumed them outside. Then saying, "I clean disremembered I 'd got to see a man. So long, till to-morrow," he disappeared whistling softly.

The old woodland hush fell back upon the school. It seemed very quiet and empty. A faint sense of remorse stole over the master. Yet he remembered that Uncle Ben had accepted without reproach and as a good joke much more direct accusations from Rupert Filgee, and that he himself had acted from a conscientious sense of duty towards the man. But a conscientious sense of duty to inflict pain upon a fellow mortal for his own good does not always bring perfect serenity to the inflicter — possibly because, in the defective machinery of human compensation, pain is the only quality that is apt to appear in the illustration. Mr. Ford felt uncomfortable, and, being so, was naturally vexed at the innocent cause. Why should Uncle Ben be offended because he had simply declined to follow his weak fabrications any further? This was his return for having tolerated it at first! It would be a lesson to him henceforth. Nevertheless he got up and went to the door. The figure of Uncle Ben was already indistinct among the leaves, but from the motion of his shoulders he seemed to be still stepping high and softly as if not yet clear of insecure and engulfing ground.

The silence still continuing, the master began mechanically

to look over the desks for forgotten or mislaid articles, and to rearrange the pupils' books and copies. A few heartsease gathered by the devoted Octavia Dean, neatly tied with a black thread and regularly left in the inkstand cavity of Rupert's desk, were still lying on the floor where they had been always hurled with equal regularity by that disdainful Adonis. Picking up a slate from under a bench, his attention was attracted by a forgotten cartoon on the reverse side. Mr. Ford at once recognized it as the work of that youthful but eminent caricaturist, Johnny Filgee. Broad in treatment, comprehensive in subject, liberal in detail and slate-pencil — it represented Uncle Ben lying on the floor with a book in his hand, tyrannized over by Rupert Filgee, and regarded in a striking profile of two features by Cressy McKinstry. The daring realism of introducing the names of each character on their legs — perhaps ideally enlarged for that purpose — left no doubt of their identity. Equally daring but no less effective was the rendering of a limited but dramatic conversation between the parties by the aid of emotional balloons attached to their mouths like a visible gulp bearing the respective legends: "I luv you," "O my," and "You git!"

The master was for a moment startled at this unlooked-for but graphic testimony to the fact that Uncle Ben's visits to the school were not only known but commented upon. The small eyes of those youthful observers had been keener than his own. He had again been stupidly deceived, in spite of his efforts. Love, albeit deficient in features and wearing an improperly short bell-shaped frock, had boldly reëntered the peaceful school, and disturbing complications on abnormal legs were following at its heels.

CHAPTER V

While this simple pastoral life was centred around the schoolhouse in the clearing, broken only by an occasional warning pistol-shot in the direction of the Harrison-McKinstry boundaries, the more business part of Indian Spring was overtaken by one of those spasms of enterprise peculiar to all Californian mining settlements. The opening of the Eureka Ditch and the extension of stage-coach communication from Big Bluff were events of no small importance, and were celebrated on the same day. The double occasion overtaxing even the fluent rhetoric of the editor of the "Star" left him struggling in the metaphorical difficulties of a Pactolian Spring, which he had rashly turned into the Ditch, and obliged him to transfer the onerous duty of writing the editorial on the Big Bluff Extension to the hands of the Honorable Abner Dean, Assemblyman from Angel's. The loss of the Honorable Mr. Dean's right eye in an early pioneer fracas did not prevent him from looking into the dim vista of the future and discovering with that single unaided optic enough to fill three columns of the "Star." "It is not too extravagant to say," he remarked, with charming deprecation, "that Indian Spring, through its own perfectly organized system of inland transportation, the confluence of its North Fork with the Sacramento River, and their combined effluence into the illimitable Pacific, is thus put not only into direct communication with far Cathay but even remoter Antipodean markets. The citizen of Indian Spring taking the 9 A. M. Pioneer Coach and arriving at Big Bluff at 2.40 is enabled to con-

nect with the through express to Sacramento the same evening, reaching San Francisco per the Steam Navigation Company's palatial steamers in time to take the Pacific Mail Steamer to Yokohama on the following day at 3.30 P. M." Although no citizen of Indian Spring appeared to avail himself of this admirable opportunity, nor did it appear at all likely that any would, everybody vaguely felt that an inestimable boon lay in the suggestion, and even the master, professionally intrusting the reading aloud of the editorial to Rupert Filgee with ulterior designs of practice in the pronunciation of five-syllable words, was somewhat affected by it. Johnny Filgee and Jimmy Snyder, accepting it as a mysterious something that made Desert Islands accessible at a moment's notice and a trifling outlay, were round-eyed and attentive. And the culminating information from the master that this event would be commemorated by a half-holiday, combined to make the occasion as exciting to the simple schoolhouse in the clearing as it was to the gilded saloon in the main street.

And so the momentous day arrived, with its two new coaches from Big Bluff containing the specially invited speakers — always specially invited to those occasions, and yet strangely enough never before feeling the extreme "importance and privilege" of it as they did then. Then there were the firing of two anvils, the strains of a brass band, the hoisting of a new flag on the liberty-pole, and later the ceremony of the Ditch opening, when a distinguished speaker in a most unworkmanlike tall hat, black frock coat, and white cravat, which gave him the general air of a festive grave-digger, took a spade from the hands of an apparently hilarious chief mourner and threw out the first sods. There were anvils, brass bands, and a "collation" at the hotel. But everywhere — overriding the most extravagant expectation and even the laughter it provoked — the spirit of indomitable youth and resistless enterprise

intoxicated the air. It was the spirit that had made California possible; that had sown a thousand such ventures broadcast through its wilderness; that had enabled the sower to stand half humorously among his scant or ruined harvests without fear and without repining, and turn his undaunted and ever hopeful face to further fields. What mattered it that Indian Spring had always before its eyes the abandoned trenches and ruined outworks of its earlier pioneers? What mattered it that the eloquent eulogist of the Eureka Ditch had but a few years before as prodigally scattered his adjectives and his fortune on the useless tunnel that confronted him on the opposite side of the river? The sublime forgetfulness of youth ignored its warning or recognized it as a joke. The master, fresh from his little flock and prematurely aged by their contact, felt a stirring of something like envy as he wandered among the scarcely older enthusiasts.

Especially memorable was the exciting day to Johnny Filgee, not only for the delightfully bewildering clamor of the brass band, in which, between the trombone and the bass drum, he had got inextricably mixed; not only for the half-frightening explosions of the anvils and the maddening smell of the gunpowder which had exalted his infant soul to sudden and irrelevant whoopings, but for a singular occurrence that whetted his always keen perceptions. Having been shamelessly abandoned on the veranda of the Eureka Hotel while his brother Rupert paid bashful court to the pretty proprietress by assisting her in her duties, Johnny gave himself up to unlimited observation. The rosettes of the six horses, the new harness, the length of the driver's whiplash, his enormous buckskin gloves and the way he held his reins; the fascinating odor of shining varnish on the coach, the gold-headed cane of the Honorable Abner Dean: all these were stored away in the secret recesses of Johnny's memory, even as the unconsidered trifles

he had picked up en route were distending his capacious pockets. But when a young man had alighted from the second or "Truly" coach among the *real* passengers, and strolled carelessly and easily in the veranda as if the novelty and the occasion were nothing to him, Johnny, with a gulp of satisfaction, knew that he had seen a prince! Beautifully dressed in a white duck suit, with a diamond ring on his finger, a gold chain swinging from his fob, and a Panama hat with a broad black ribbon jauntily resting on his curled and scented hair, Johnny's eyes had never rested on a more resplendent vision. He was more romantic than Yuba Bill, more imposing and less impossible than the Honorable Abner Dean, more eloquent than the master — far more beautiful than any colored print that he had ever seen. Had he brushed him in passing Johnny would have felt a thrill; had he spoken to him he knew he would have been speechless to reply. Judge then of his utter stupefaction when he saw Uncle Ben — actually Uncle Ben! — approach this paragon of perfection, albeit with some embarrassment, and after a word or two of unintelligible conversation walk away with him! Need it be wondered that Johnny, forgetful at once of his brother, the horses, and even the collation with its possible "goodies," instantly followed.

The two men turned into the side street, which, after a few hundred yards, opened upon the deserted mining flat, crossed and broken by the burrows and mounds made by the forgotten engines of the early gold-seekers. Johnny, at times hidden by these irregularities, kept closely in their rear, sauntering whenever he came within the range of their eyes in that sidelong, spasmodic, and generally diagonal fashion peculiar to small boys, but ready at any moment to assume utter unconsciousness and the appearance of going somewhere else or of searching for something on the ground. In this way appearing, if noticed at all, each time in some

different position to the right or left of them, Johnny followed them to the fringe of woodland which enabled him to draw closer to their heels.

Utterly oblivious of this artistic "shadowing" in the insignificant person of the small boy who once or twice even crossed their path with affected timidity, they continued an apparently confidential previous interview. The words "stocks" and "shares" were alone intelligible. Johnny had heard them during the day, but he was struck by the fact that Uncle Ben seemed to be seeking information from the paragon and was perfectly submissive and humble. But the boy was considerably mystified when after a tramp of half an hour they arrived upon the debatable ground of the Harrison-McKinstry boundary. Having been especially warned never to go there, Johnny as a matter of course was perfectly familiar with it. But what was the incomprehensible stranger doing there? Was he brought by Uncle Ben with a view of paralyzing both of the combatants with the spectacle of his perfections? Was he a youthful sheriff, a young judge, or maybe the son of the Governor of California? Or was it that Uncle Ben was "silly" and did n't know the locality? Here was an opportunity for him, Johnny, to introduce himself, and explain and even magnify the danger, with perhaps a slight allusion to his own fearless familiarity with it. Unfortunately, as he was making up his small mind behind a tree, the paragon turned and with the easy disdain that so well became him, said: —

"Well, I would n't offer a dollar an acre for the whole ranch. But if *you* choose to give a fancy price — that 's your lookout."

To Johnny's already prejudiced mind, Uncle Ben received this just contempt submissively, as he ought, but nevertheless he muttered something "silly" in reply, which Johnny was really too disgusted to listen to. Ought he not to step forward and inform the paragon that he was

wasting time on a man who could n't even spell "ba-ker," and who was taught his letters by his, Johnny's, brother?

The paragon continued: —

"And of course you know that merely your buying the title to the land don't give you possession. You 'll have to fight these squatters and jumpers just the same. It 'll be three instead of two fighting — that 's all!"

Uncle Ben's imbecile reply did not trouble Johnny. He had ears now only for the superior intellect before him. *It* continued coolly: —

"Now let 's take a look at that yield of yours. I have n't much time to give you, as I expect some men to be looking for me here — and I suppose you want this thing still kept a secret. I don't see how you 've managed to do it so far. Is your claim near? You live on it — I think you said?"

But that the little listener was so preoccupied with the stranger, this suggestion of Uncle Ben's having a claim worth the attention of that distinguished presence would have set him thinking; the little that he understood he set down to Uncle Ben's "gassin'." As the two men moved forward again, he followed them until Uncle Ben's house was reached.

It was a rude shanty of boards and rough boulders, half burrowing in one of the largest mounds of earth and gravel which had once represented the tailings or refuse of the abandoned Indian Spring Placer. In fact, it was casually alleged by some that Uncle Ben eked out the scanty "grub wages," he made by actual mining, in reworking and sifting the tailings at odd times — a degrading work hitherto only practiced by Chinese, and unworthy the Caucasian ambition. The mining code of honor held that a man might accept the smallest results of his daily labor, as long as he was sustained by the prospect of a larger "strike," but condemned his contentment with a modest certainty. Nevertheless a

little of this suspicion encompassed his dwelling and contributed to its loneliness, even as a long ditch, the former tail-race of the claim, separated him from his neighbors. Prudently halting at the edge of the wood, Johnny saw his resplendent vision cross the strip of barren flat, and enter the cabin with Uncle Ben like any other mortal. He sat down on a stump and awaited its return, which he fondly hoped might be alone! At the end of half an hour he made a short excursion to examine the condition of a blackberry bramble, and returned to his post of observation. But there was neither sound nor motion in the direction of the cabin. When another ten minutes had elapsed, the door opened and to Johnny's intense discomfiture, Uncle Ben appeared alone and walked leisurely towards the woods. Burning with anxiety Johnny threw himself in Uncle Ben's way. But here occurred one of those surprising inconsistencies known only to children. As Uncle Ben turned his small gray eyes upon him in a half-astonished, half-questioning manner, the potent spirit of childish secretiveness suddenly took possession of the boy. Wild horses could not now have torn from him that question which only a moment before was on his lips.

"Hullo, Johnny! What are ye doin' here?" said Uncle Ben kindly.

"Nothin'." After a pause, in which he walked all round Uncle Ben's large figure, gazing up at him as if he were a monument, he added, "Huntin' blackberrieth."

"Why ain't you over at the collation?"

"Ruperth there," he answered promptly.

The idea of being thus vicariously present in the person of his brother seemed a sufficient excuse. He leap-frogged over the stump on which he had been sitting as an easy unembarrassing pause for the next question. But Uncle Ben was apparently perfectly satisfied with Johnny's reply, and nodding to him, walked away.

When his figure had disappeared in the bushes, Johnny cautiously approached the cabin. At a certain distance he picked up a stone and threw it against the door, immediately taking to his heels and the friendly copse again. No one appearing he repeated the experiment twice and even thrice with a larger stone and at a nearer distance. Then he boldly skirted the cabin and dropped into the raceway at its side. Following it a few hundred yards he came upon a long disused shaft opening into it, which had been covered with a rough trap of old planks, as if to protect incautious wayfarers from falling in. Here a sudden and inexplicable fear overtook Johnny, and he ran away. When he reached the hotel, almost the first sight that met his astounded eyes was the spectacle of the paragon, apparently still in undisturbed possession of all his perfections — driving coolly off in a buggy with a fresh companion.

Meantime Mr. Ford, however touched by the sentimental significance of the celebration, became slightly wearied of its details. As his own room in the Eureka Hotel was actually thrilled by the brass band without and the eloquence of speakers below, and had become redolent of gunpowder and champagne exploded around it, he determined to return to the schoolhouse and avail himself of its woodland quiet to write a few letters.

The change was grateful, the distant murmur of the excited settlement came only as the soothing sound of wind among the leaves. The pure air of the pines that filled every cranny of the quiet schoolroom, and seemed to disperse all taint of human tenancy, made the far-off celebrations as unreal as a dream. The only reality of his life was here.

He took from his pocket a few letters — one of which was worn and soiled with frequent handling. He re-read it in a half-methodical, half-patient way, as if he were waiting for some revelation it inspired, which was slow that

afternoon in coming. At other times it had called up a youthful enthusiasm which was wont to transfigure his grave and prematurely reserved face with a new expression. To-day the revelation and expression were both wanting. He put the letter back with a slight sigh, that sounded so preposterous in the silent room that he could not forego an embarrassed smile. But the next moment he set himself seriously to work on his correspondence.

Presently he stopped; once or twice he had been overtaken by a vague undefinable sense of pleasure, even to the dreamy halting of his pen. It was a sensation in no way connected with the subject of his correspondence, or even his previous reflections — it was partly physical, and yet it was in some sense suggestive. It must be the intoxicating effect of the woodland air. He even fancied he had noticed it before, at the same hour when the sun was declining and the fresh odors of the undergrowth were rising. It certainly was a perfume. He raised his eyes. There lay the cause on the desk before him — a little nosegay of wild Californian myrtle encircling a rose-bud which had escaped his notice.

There was nothing unusual in the circumstance. The children were in the habit of making their offerings generally without particular reference to time or occasion, and it might have been overlooked by him during school hours. He felt a pity for the forgotten posy already beginning to grow limp in its neglected solitude. He remembered that in some folk-lore of the children's, perhaps a tradition of the old association of the myrtle with Venus, it was believed to be emblematic of the affections. He remembered also that he had even told them of this probable origin of their superstition. He was still holding it in his hand when he was conscious of a silken sensation that sent a magnetic thrill through his fingers. Looking at it more closely he saw that the sprigs were bound together,

not by thread or ribbon, but by long filaments of soft brown hair tightly wound around them. He unwound a single hair and held it to the light. Its length, color, texture, and above all a certain inexplicable instinct, told him it was Cressy McKinstry's. He laid it down quickly, as if he had, in that act, familiarly touched her person.

He finished his letter, but presently found himself again looking at the myrtle and thinking about it. From the position in which it had been placed it was evidently intended for him; the fancy of binding it with hair was also intentional and not a necessity, as he knew his feminine scholars were usually well provided with bits of thread, silk, or ribbon. If it had been some new absurdity of childish fashion introduced in the school, he would have noticed it ere this. For it was this intrusion of a personality that vaguely troubled him. He remembered Cressy's hair; it was certainly very beautiful, in spite of her occasional vagaries of coiffure. He recalled how, one afternoon, it had come down when she was romping with Octavia in the playground, and was surprised to find what a vivid picture he retained of her lingering in the porch to put it up: her rounded arms held above her head, her pretty shoulders, full throat, and glowing face thrown back, and a wisp of the very hair between her white teeth! He began another letter.

When it was finished the shadow of the pine branch before the window, thrown by the nearly level sun across his paper, had begun slowly to reach the opposite wall. He put his work away, lingered for a moment in hesitation over the myrtle sprays, and then locked them in his desk with an odd feeling that he had secured in some vague way a hold upon Cressy's future vagaries; then reflecting that Uncle Ben, whom he had seen in town, would probably keep holiday with the others, he resolved to wait no longer, but strolled back to the hotel. The act, however, had not recalled Uncle Ben to him by any association of ideas, for

since his discovery of Johnny Filgee's caricature he had failed to detect anything to corroborate the caricaturist's satire, and had dismissed the subject from his mind.

On entering his room at the hotel he found Rupert Filgee standing moodily by the window, while his brother Johnny, overcome by a repletion of excitement and collation, was asleep on the single armchair. Their presence was not unusual, as Mr. Ford, touched by the loneliness of these motherless boys, had often invited them to come to his rooms to look over his books and illustrated papers.

"Well?" he said cheerfully.

Rupert did not reply or change his position. Mr. Ford, glancing at him sharply, saw a familiar angry light in the boy's beautiful eyes, slightly dimmed by a tear. Laying his hand gently on Rupert's shoulder he said, "What 's the matter, Rupert?"

"Nothin'," said the boy doggedly, with his eyes still fixed on the pane.

"Has — has — Mrs. Tripp" (the fair proprietress) "been unkind?" he went on lightly.

No reply.

"You know, Rupe," continued Mr. Ford demurely, "she must show *some* reserve before company — like to-day. It won't do to make a scandal."

Rupert maintained an indignant silence. But the dimple (which he usually despised as a feminine blot) on the cheek nearer the master became slightly accented. Only for a moment; the dark eyes clouded again.

"I wish I was dead, Mr. Ford."

"Hallo!"

"Or — doin' suthin'."

"That 's better. What do you want to do?"

"To work — make a livin' myself. Quit toten' wood and water at home; quit cookin' and makin' beds, like a yaller Chinaman; quit nussin' babies and dressin' 'em and

undressin' 'em, like a girl. Look at *him* now," pointing to the sweetly unconscious Johnny, "look at him there. Do you know what that means? It means I've got to pack him home through the town jist ez he is thar, and then make a fire and bile his food for him, and wash him and undress him and put him to bed, and 'Now I lay me down to sleep' him, and tuck him up; and dad all the while scootin' round town with other idjits, jawin' about 'progress' and the 'future of Injun Spring.' Much future we've got over our own house, Mr. Ford. Much future he's got laid up for me!"

The master, to whom those occasional outbreaks from Rupert were not unfamiliar, smiled, albeit with serious eyes that belied his lips, and consoled the boy as he had often done before. But he was anxious to know the cause of this recent attack and its probable relations to the fascinating Mrs. Tripp.

"I thought we talked all that over some time ago, Rupe. In a few months you'll be able to leave school, and I'll advise your father about putting you into something to give you a chance for yourself. Patience, old fellow; you're doing very well. Consider — there's your pupil, Uncle Ben."

"Oh yes! That's another big baby to tot round in school when I ain't niggerin' at home."

"And I don't see exactly what else you could do at Indian Spring," continued Mr. Ford.

"No," said Rupert gloomily, "but I could get away to Sacramento. Yuba Bill says they take boys no bigger nor me in thar express offices or banks — and in a year or two they're as good ez anybody and get paid as big. Why, there was a fellow here, just now, no older than you, Mr. Ford, and not half your learnin', and he dressed to death with jewelry, and everybody bowin' and scrapin' to him, that it was perfectly sickenin'."

Mr. Ford lifted his eyebrows. "Oh, you mean the young man of Benham and Co., who was talking to Mrs. Tripp?" he said.

A quick flush of angry consciousness crossed Rupert's face. "Maybe; he has just cheek enough for anythin'."

"And you want to be like him?" said Mr. Ford.

"You know what I mean, Mr. Ford. Not *like* him. Why, *you 're* as good as he is, any day," continued Rupert, with relenting *naïveté;* "but if a jay-bird like that can get on, why could n't I?"

There was no doubt that the master here pointed out the defectiveness of Rupert's logic and the beneficence of patience and study, as became their relations of master and pupil, but with the addition of a certain fellow sympathy and some amusing recital of his own boyish experiences, that had the effect of calling dimples into action again. At the end of half an hour the boy had become quite tractable, and, getting ready to depart, approached his sleeping brother with something like resignation. But Johnny's nap seemed to have had the effect of transforming him into an inert jelly-like mass. It required the joint exertions of both the master and Rupert to transfer him bodily into the latter's arms, where, with a single limp elbow encircling his brother's neck, he lay with his unfinished slumber still visibly distending his cheeks, his eyelids, and even lifting his curls from his moist forehead. The master bade Rupert "good-night," and returned to his room as the boy descended the stairs with his burden.

But here Providence, with, I fear, its occasional disregard of mere human morality, rewarded Rupert after his own foolish desires. Mrs. Tripp was at the foot of the stairs as Rupert came slowly down. He saw her, and was covered with shame; she saw him and his burden, and was touched with kindliness. Whether or not she was also mischievously aware of Rupert's admiration, and was

not altogether displeased with it, I cannot say. In a voice that thrilled him, she said : —

"What! Rupert, are you going so soon ?"

"Yes, ma'am — on account of Johnny."

"But let me take him — I can keep him here to-night."

It was a great temptation, but Rupert had strength to refuse, albeit with his hat pulled over his downcast eyes.

"Poor dear, how tired he looks."

She approached her still fresh and pretty face close to Rupert and laid her lips on Johnny's cheek. Then she lifted her audacious eyes to his brother, and pushing back his well-worn chip hat from his clustering curls, she kissed him squarely on the forehead.

"Good-night, dear."

The boy stumbled, and then staggered blindly forward into the outer darkness. But with a gentleman's delicacy he turned almost instantly into a side street, as if to keep this consecration of himself from vulgar eyes. The path he had chosen was rough and weary, the night was dark, and Johnny was ridiculously heavy, but he kept steadily on, the woman's kiss in the fancy of the foolish boy shining on his forehead and lighting him onward like a star.

CHAPTER VI

When the door closed on Rupert the master pulled down the blind, and, trimming his lamp, tried to compose himself by reading. Outside, the "Great Day for Indian Spring" was slowly evaporating in pale mists from the river, and the celebration itself spasmodically taking flight here and there in Roman candles and rockets. An occasional outbreak from revelers in the bar-room below, a stumbling straggler along the planked sidewalk before the hotel, only seemed to intensify the rustic stillness. For the future of Indian Spring was still so remote that Nature insensibly reinvested its boundaries on the slightest relaxation of civic influence, and Mr. Ford lifted his head from the glowing columns of the "Star" to listen to the far-off yelp of a coyote on the opposite shore.

He was also conscious of the recurrence of that vague, pleasurable recollection, so indefinite that, when he sought to identify it with anything, — even the finding of the myrtle sprays on his desk, — it evaded him. He tried to work, with the same interruption. Then an uneasy sensation that he had not been sufficiently kind to Rupert in his foolish love-troubles remorsefully seized him. A half-pathetic, half-humorous picture of the miserable Rupert staggering under the double burden of his sleeping brother and a misplaced affection, or possibly abandoning the one or both in the nearest ditch in a reckless access of boyish frenzy and fleeing his home forever, rose before his eyes. He seized his hat with the intention of seeking him — or forgetting him in some other occupation by the way. For Mr. Ford

had the sensitive conscience of many imaginative people; an unfailing monitor, it was always calling his whole moral being into play to evade it.

As he crossed the passage he came upon Mrs. Tripp hooded and elaborately attired in a white ball dress, which however did not, to his own fancy, become her as well as her ordinary costume. He was passing her with a bow, when she said, with complacent consciousness of her appearance, "Are n't you going to the ball to-night?"

He remembered then that "an opening ball" at the Court-house was a part of the celebration. "No," he said smiling; "but it is a pity that Rupert could n't have seen you in your charming array."

"Rupert," said the lady, with a slightly coquettish laugh; "you have made him as much a woman-hater as yourself. I offered to take him in our party, and he ran away to you." She paused, and giving him a furtive critical glance said, with an easy mingling of confidence and audacity, "Why don't *you* go? Nobody'll hurt you."

"I'm not sure of that," replied Mr. Ford gallantly. "There 's the melancholy example of Rupert always before me."

Mrs. Tripp tossed her chignon and descended a step of the stairs. "You 'd better go," she continued, looking up over the balusters. "You can look on if you can't dance."

Now Mr. Ford could dance, and it so chanced, rather well, too. With this consciousness he remained standing in half-indignant hesitation on the landing as she disappeared. Why should n't he go? It was true, he had half-tacitly acquiesced in the reserve with which he had been treated, and had never mingled socially in the gatherings of either sex at Indian Spring — but that was no reason. He could at least dress himself, walk to the Court-house and — look on.

Any black coat and white shirt was sufficiently *de rigueur* for Indian Spring. Mr. Ford added the superfluous elegance of a forgotten white waistcoat. When he reached the sidewalk it was only nine o'clock, but the windows of the Court-house were already flaring like a stranded steamer on the barren bank where it had struck. On the way thither he was once or twice tempted to change his mind, and hesitated even at the very door. But the fear that his hesitation would be noticed by the few loungers before it, and the fact that some of them were already hesitating through bashfulness, determined him to enter.

The clerks' office and judges' chambers on the lower floor had been invaded by wraps, shawls, and refreshments, but the dancing was reserved for the upper floor or court-room, still unfinished. Flags, laurel wreaths, and appropriate floral inscriptions hid its bare walls; but the coat of arms of the State, already placed over the judges' dais with its illimitable golden sunset, its triumphant goddess, and its implacable grizzly, seemed figuratively to typify the occasion better than the inscriptions. The room was close and crowded. The flickering candles in tin sconces against the walls, or depending in rude chandeliers of barrel-hoops from the ceiling, lit up the most astonishing diversity of female costume the master had ever seen. Gowns of bygone fashions, creased and stained with packing and disuse, toilets of forgotten festivity revised with modern additions; garments in and out of season — a fur-trimmed jacket and a tulle skirt, a velvet robe under a piqué sacque; fresh young faces beneath faded head-dresses, and mature and buxom charms in virgin white. The small space cleared for the dancers was continually invaded by the lookers-on, who in files of three deep lined the room.

As the master pushed his way to the front, a young girl, who had been standing in the sides of a quadrille, suddenly darted with a nymph-like quickness among the crowd and

was for an instant hidden. Without distinguishing either face or figure, Mr. Ford recognized in the quick, impetuous action a characteristic movement of Cressy's; with an embarrassing instinct that he could not account for, he knew she had seen him, and that, for some inexplicable reason, he was the cause of her sudden disappearance.

But it was only for a moment. Even while he was vaguely scanning the crowd she reappeared and took her place beside her mystified partner — the fascinating stranger of Johnny's devotion and Rupert's dislike. She was pale; he had never seen her so beautiful. All that he had thought distasteful and incongruous in her were but accessories of her loveliness at that moment, in that light, in that atmosphere, in that strange assembly. Even her full pink gauze dress, from which her fair young shoulders slipped as from a sunset cloud, seemed only the perfection of virginal simplicity; her girlish length of limb and the long curves of her neck and back were now the outlines of thorough breeding. The absence of color in her usually fresh face had been replaced by a faint magnetic aurora that seemed to him half spiritual. He could not take his eyes from her; he could not believe what he saw. Yet that was Cressy McKinstry — his pupil! Had he ever really seen her? Did he know her now? Small wonder that all eyes were bent upon her, that a murmur of unspoken admiration or still more intense hush of silence moved the people around him. He glanced hurriedly at them, and was oddly relieved by this evident participation in his emotions.

She was dancing now, and with that same pale restraint and curious quiet that had affected him so strongly. She had not even looked in his direction, yet he was aware by the same instinct that had at first possessed him that she knew he was present. His desire to catch her eye was becoming mingled with a certain dread, as if in a single interchange of glances the illusions of the moment would

either vanish utterly or become irrevocably fixed. He forced himself, when the set was finished, to turn away, partly to avoid contact with some acquaintances who had drifted before him, and whom politeness would have obliged him to ask to dance, and partly to collect his thoughts. He determined to make a tour of the rooms and then go quietly home. Those who recognized him made way for him with passive curiosity ; the middle-aged and older adding a confidential sympathy and equality that positively irritated him. For an instant he had an idea of seeking out Mrs. Tripp and claiming her as a partner, merely to show her that he danced.

He had nearly made the circuit of the room when he was surprised by the first strains of a waltz. Waltzing was not a strong feature of Indian Spring festivity, partly that the Church people had serious doubts if David's saltatory performances before the Ark included "round dances," and partly that the young had not yet mastered its difficulties. When he yielded to his impulse to look again at the dancers he found that only three or four couples had been bold enough to take the floor. Cressy McKinstry and her former partner were one of them. In his present exaltation he was not astonished to find that she had evidently picked up the art in her late visit, and was now waltzing with quiet grace and precision, but he was surprised that her partner was far from being equally perfect, and that after a few turns she stopped and smilingly disengaged her waist from his arm. As she stepped back she turned with unerring instinct to that part of the room where the master stood, and raised her eyes through the multitude of admiring faces to his. Their eyes met in an isolation as supreme as if they had been alone. It was an attraction the more dangerous because unformulated — a possession without previous pledge, promise, or even intention — a love that did not require to be "made."

He approached her quietly and even more coolly than he thought possible. "Will you allow me a trial?" he asked.

She looked in his face, and as if she had not heard the question but was following her own thought, said, "I knew you would come; I saw you when you first came in." Without another word she put her hand in his, and as if it were part of an instinctive action of drawing closer to him, caught with her advancing foot the accent of the waltz, and the next moment the room seemed to slip away from them into whirling space.

The whole thing had passed so rapidly from the moment he approached her to the first graceful swing of her full skirt at his side, that it seemed to him almost like the embrace of a lovers' meeting. He had often been as near her before, had stood at her side at school, and even leaned over her desk, but always with an irritated instinct of reserve that had equally affected her, and which he now understood. With her conscious but pale face so near his own, with the faint odor of her hair clinging to her, and with the sweet confusion of the half-lingering, half-withheld contact of her hand and arm, all had changed. He did not dare to reflect that he could never again approach her except with this feeling. He did not dare to think of anything; he abandoned himself to the sense that had begun with the invasion of her hair-bound myrtle in the silent schoolroom, and seemed to have at last led her to his arms. They were moving now in such perfect rhythm and unison that they seemed scarcely conscious of motion. Once when they neared the open window he caught a glimpse of the round moon rising above the solemn heights of the opposite shore, and felt the cool breath of mountain and river sweep his cheek and mingle a few escaped threads of her fair hair with his own. With that glimpse and that sensation the vulgarity and the tawdriness of their surroundings, the guttering candles in their sconces, the bizarre figures, the unmeaning faces seemed

to be whirled far into distant space. They were alone with night and Nature; it was they who were still; all else had receded in a vanishing perspective of dull reality, in which they had no part.

Play on, O waltz of Strauss! Whirl on, O love and youth! For you cannot whirl so swiftly but that this receding world will return again with narrowing circle to hem you in. Faster, O cracked clarionet! Louder, O too brazen bassoon! Keep back, O dull and earthy environment, till master and pupil have dreamed their foolish dream!

They are in fancy alone on the river-bank, only the round moon above them and their linked shadows faintly fluttering in the stream. They have drawn so closely together now that her arm is encircling his neck, her soft eyes uplifted like the moon's reflection and drowning into his; closer and closer till their hearts stop beating and their lips have met in a first kiss. Faster, O little feet! swing clear, O Cressy's skirt and keep the narrowing circle back! . . . They are again alone; the judges' dais and the emblazoning of the State caught in a single whirling flash of consciousness are changed to an altar, seen dimly through the bridal veil that covers her fair head. There is the murmur of voices mingling two lives in one. They turn and pass proudly down between the aisles of wondering festal faces. Ah! the circle is drawing closer. One more quick whirl to keep them back, O flying skirt and dainty-winged feet! Too late! The music stops. The tawdry walls shut in again, the vulgar crowds return, they stand pale and quiet, the centre of a ring of breathless, admiring, frightened, or forbidding faces. Her arms fold like wings at her side. The waltz is over.

A shrill feminine chorus assail her with praises, struck here and there with a metallic ring of envy; a dozen all daring cavaliers, made reckless by her grace and beauty,

clamor for her hand in the next waltz. She replies, not to them, but to him, "Not again," and slips away in the crowd with that strange new shyness that of all her transformations seems the most delicious. Yet so conscious are they of their mutual passion that they do not miss each other, and he turns away as if their next meeting were already an appointed tryst. A few congratulate him on his skill. Johnny's paragon looks after him curiously; certain elders shake hands with him perplexedly, as if not quite sure of the professional consistency of his performance. Those charming tide-waiters on social success, the fair, artfully mingling expectation with compliment, only extract from him the laughing statement that this one waltz was the single exception allowed him from the rule of his professional conduct, and he refers them to his elder critics. A single face, loutish, looming, and vindictive, stands out among the crowd — the face of Seth Davis. He had not seen him since he left the school; he had forgotten his existence; even now he only remembered his successor, Joe Masters, and he looked curiously around to see if that later suitor of Cressy's was present. It was not until he reached the door that he began to think seriously of Seth Davis's jealous face, and was roused to a singular indignation. "Why had n't this great fool vented his jealousy on the openly compromising Masters," he thought. He even turned and walked back with some vaguely aggressive instinct, but the young man had disappeared. With this incident still in his mind he came upon Uncle Ben and Hiram McKinstry, standing among the spectators in the doorway. Why might not Uncle Ben be jealous too? and if his single waltz had really appeared so compromising, why should not Cressy's father object? But both men — albeit, McKinstry usually exhibited a vague unreasoning contempt for Uncle Ben — were unanimous in their congratulations and outspoken admiration.

"When I seed you sail in, Mr. Ford," said Uncle Ben, with abstract reflectiveness, "I sez to the fellers, 'lie low, boys, and you 'll see style.' And when you put on them first steps, I sez, 'that 's French — the latest high-toned French style — outer the best masters, and — outer the best books. For why ?' sez I. 'It 's the same long, sliding stroke you see in his copies. There 's that long up sweep, and that easy curve to the right with no hitch. That 's the sorter swing he hez in readin' po'try too. That 's why it 's called the po'try of motion,' sez I. 'And you ken bet your boots, boys, it 's all in the trainin' o' education.'"

"Mr. Ford," said Mr. McKinstry gravely, slightly waving a lavender-colored kid glove, with which he had elected to conceal his maimed hand, and at the same moment indicate a festal occasion, "I hev to thank ye for the way you took out that child o' mine, like ez she woz an ontried filly, and put her through her paces. I don't dance myself, partikly in that gait — which I take to be suthin' betwixt a lope and a canter — and I don't get to see much dancin' nowadays on account o' bein' worrited by stock, but seein' you two together just now, suthin' came over me, and I don't think I ever felt so kam in my life."

The blood rushed to the master's cheek with an unexpected consciousness of guilt and shame. "But," he stammered awkwardly, "your daughter dances beautifully herself; she has certainly had practice."

"That," said McKinstry, laying his gloved hand impressively on the master's shoulder, with the empty little finger still more emphasized by being turned backward in the act, "that may be ez it ez, but I wanted to say that it was the simple, easy, fammily touch that you gev it, that took me. Toward the end, when you kinder gathered her up and she sorter dropped her head into your breast pocket, and seemed to go to sleep, like ez ef she was still a little girl, it so

reminded me of the times when I used to tote her myself walkin' by the waggin at Platt River, that it made me wish the old woman was here to see it."

Still coloring, the master cast a rapid, sidelong glance at McKinstry's dark red face and beard, but in the slow satisfaction of his features there was no trace of that irony which the master's self-consciousness knew.

"Then your wife is not here?" said Mr. Ford abstractedly.

"She war at church. She reckoned that I 'd do to look arter Cressy — she bein', so to speak, under conviction. D' ye mind walkin' this way a bit; I want to speak a word with ye?" He put his maimed hand through the master's arm, after his former fashion, and led him to a corner.

"Did ye happen to see Seth Davis about yer?"

"I believe I saw him a moment ago," returned Mr. Ford half contemptuously.

"Did he get off anythin' rough on ye?"

"Certainly not," said the master haughtily. "Why should he dare?"

"That 's so," said McKinstry meditatively. "You had better keep right on in that line. That 's your gait, remember. Leave him — or his father — it 's the same thing — to *me*. Don't *you* let yourself be roped in to this yer row betwixt me and the Davises. You ain't got no call to do it. It 's already been on my mind your bringin' that gun to me in the Harrison row. The old woman had n't oughter let you — nor Cress either. Hark to me, Mr. Ford! I reckon to stand between you and both the Davises till the cows come home — only — mind *you* give him the go-by when he happens to meander along towards you."

"I 'm very much obliged to you," said Ford, with disproportionately sudden choler; "but I don't propose to alter my habits for a ridiculous schoolboy whom I have dismissed." The unjust and boyish petulance of his

speech instantly flashed upon him, and he felt his cheek burn again.

McKinstry regarded him with dull, red, slumbrous eyes. "Don't you go to lose your best holt, Mr. Ford — and that 's kam. Keep your kam — and you 've allus got the dead-wood on Injin Springs. *I* ain't got it," he continued in his slowest, most passionless manner, "and a row more or less ain't much account to me — but *you*, you keep your kam." He paused, stepped back, and regarding the master, with a slight wave of his crippled hand over his whole person, as if indicating some personal adornment, said, "It sets you off!"

He nodded, turned, and reëntered the ballroom. Mr. Ford, without trusting himself to further speech, elbowed his way through the crowded staircase to the street. But even there his strange anger, as well as the equally strange remorse, which had seized him in McKinstry's presence, seemed to evaporate in the clear moonlight and soft summer air. There was the river-bank, with the tremulous river glancing through the dreamy mist, as they had seen it from the window together. He even turned to look back on the lighted ballroom, as if *she* might have been looking out, too. But he knew he should see her again tomorrow, and he hurriedly put aside all reserve, all thought of the future, all examination of his conduct, to walk home enwrapped in the vaguer pleasure of the past. Rupert Filgee, to whom he had never given a second thought, now peacefully slumbering beside his baby brother, had not gone home in more foolish or more dangerous company.

When he reached the hotel, he was surprised to find it only eleven o'clock. No one had returned, the building was deserted by all but the bar-keeper and a flirting chambermaid, who regarded him with aggrieved astonishment. He began to feel very foolish, and half regretted that he had not stayed to dance with Mrs. Tripp; or, at least, re-

mained as a quiet onlooker apart from the others. With a hasty excuse about returning to write letters for the morning's post, he took a candle and slowly remounted the stairs to his room. But on entering he found himself unprepared for that singular lack of sympathy with which familiar haunts always greet our new experiences; he could hardly believe that he had left that room only two hours before; it seemed so uncongenial and strange to the sensation that was still possessing him. Yet there were his table, his books, his armchair, his bed as he had left them; even a sticky fragment of gingerbread that had fallen from Johnny's pocket. He had not yet reached that stage of absorbing passion where he was able to put the loved one in his own surroundings; she as yet had no place in this quiet room; he could scarcely think of her here, and he *must* think of her, if he had to go elsewhere. An extravagant idea of walking the street until his restless dream was over seized him, but even in his folly the lackadaisical, moonstruck quality of such a performance was too obvious. The schoolhouse! He would go there; it was only a pleasant walk, the night was lovely, and he could bring the myrtle spray from his desk. It was too significant now — if not too precious — to be kept there. Perhaps he had not examined it closely, nor the place where it had lain; there might be an additional sign, word, or token he had overlooked. The thought thrilled him, even while he was calmly arguing to himself that it was an instinct of caution.

The air was quieter and warmer than usual, though still characteristic of the locality in its dry, dewless clarity. The grass was yet warm from the day-long sun, and when he entered the pines that surrounded the schoolhouse, they had scarcely yet lost their spicy heat. The moon, riding high, filled the dark aisles with a delicious twilight that lent itself to his waking dreams. It was not long before

to-morrow; he could easily manage to bring her here in the grove at recess, and would speak with her there. It did not occur to him what he should say, or why he should say it; it did not occur to him that he had no other provocation than her eyes, her conscious manner, her eloquent silence, and her admission that she had expected him. It did not occur to him that all this was inconsistent with what he knew of her antecedents, her character, and her habits. It was this very inconsistency that charmed and convinced him. We are always on the lookout for these miracles of passion. We may doubt the genuineness of an affection that is first-hand, but never of one that is transferred.

He approached the schoolhouse and unlocking the door closed it behind him, not so much to keep out human intrusion as the invasion of bats and squirrels. The nearly vertical moon, while it perfectly lit the playground and openings in the pines around the house, left the interior in darkness, except the reflection upon the ceiling from the shining gravel without. Partly from a sense of precaution and partly because he was familiar with the position of the benches, he did not strike a light, and reached his own desk unerringly, drew his chair before it and unlocked it, groped in its dark recess for the myrtle spray, felt its soft silken binding with an electrical thrill, drew it out, and in the security of the darkness, raised it to his lips.

To make room for it in his breast pocket he was obliged to take out his letters — among them the well-worn one he had tried to read that morning. A mingling of pleasure and remorse came over him as he felt that it was already of the past, and as he dropped it carelessly into the empty desk it fell with a faint, hollow sound as if it were ashes to ashes.

What was that?

The noise of steps upon the gravel, light laughter, the moving of two or three shadows on the ceiling, the sound of voices, a man's, a child's, and *hers!*

Could it be possible ? Was not he mistaken ? No ! the man's voice was Master's ; the child's, Octavia's ; the woman's, *hers*.

He remained silent in the shadow. The schoolroom was not far from the trail where she would have had to pass going home from the ball. But why had she come there ? had they seen him arrive ? and were mischievously watching him ? The sound of Cressy's voice and the lifting of the unprotected window near the door convinced him to the contrary.

"There, that 'll do. Now you two can step aside. 'Tave, take him over to yon fence, and keep him there till I get in. No — thank you, sir — I can assist myself. I 've done it before. It ain't the first time I 've been through this window, is it, 'Tave ?"

Ford's heart stopped beating. There was a moment of laughing expostulation, the sound of retreating voices, the sudden darkening of the window, the billowy sweep of a skirt, the faint quick flash of a little ankle, and Cressy McKinstry swung herself into the room and dropped lightly on the floor.

She advanced eagerly up the moonlit passage between the two rows of benches. Suddenly she stopped ; the master rose at the same moment with outstretched warning hand to check the cry of terror he felt sure would rise to her lips. But he did not know the lazy nerves of the girl before him. She uttered no outcry. And even in the faint dim light he could see only the same expression of conscious understanding come over her face that he had seen in the ballroom, mingled with a vague joy that parted her breathless lips. As he moved quickly forward their hands met ; she caught his with a quick significant pressure and darted back to the window.

"Oh, 'Tave !" (very languidly.)

"Yes."

"You two had better wait for me at the edge of the trail yonder, and keep a lookout for folks going by. Don't let them see you hanging round so near. Do you hear? I'm all right."

With her hand still meaningly lifted, she stood gazing at the two figures until they slowly receded towards the distant trail. Then she turned as he approached her, the reflection of the moonlit road striking up into her shining eyes and eager waiting face. A dozen questions were upon his lips, a dozen replies were ready upon hers. But they were never uttered, for the next moment her eyes half closed, she leaned forward and fell — into a kiss.

She was the first to recover, holding his face in her hands, turned towards the moonlight, her own in passionate shadow. "Listen," she said quickly. "They think I came here to look for something I left in my desk. They thought it high fun to come with me — these two. I did come to look for something — not in my desk, but yours."

"Was it this?" he whispered, taking the myrtle from his breast. She seized it with a light cry, putting it first to her lips and then to his. Then clasping his face again between her soft palms, she turned it to the window and said, "Look at them and not at me."

He did so — seeing the two figures slowly walking in the trail. And holding her there firmly against his breast, it seemed a blasphemy to ask the question that had been upon his lips.

"That's not all," she murmured, moving his face backwards and forwards to her lips as if it were something to which she was giving breath. "When we came to the woods I felt that you would be here."

"And feeling that, you brought *him?*" said Ford, drawing back.

"Why not?" she replied indolently. "Even if he had seen you, I could have managed to have you walk home with me."

"But do you think it 's quite fair? Would he like it?"

"Would *he* like it?" she echoed lazily.

"Cressy," said the young man earnestly, gazing into her shadowed face. "Have you given him any right to object? Do you understand me?"

She stopped as if thinking. "Do you want me to call him in?" she said quietly, but without the least trace of archness or coquetry. "Would you rather he were here — or shall we go out now and meet him? I 'll say you just came as I was going out."

What should he say? "Cressy," he asked almost curtly, "do you love me?"

It seemed such a ridiculous thing to ask, holding her thus in his arms, if it were true; it seemed such a villainous question, if it were not.

"I think I loved you when you first came," she said slowly. "It must have been that that made me engage myself to him," she added simply. "I knew I loved you, and thought only of you when I was away. I came back because I loved you. I loved you the day you came to see maw — even when I thought you came to tell her of Masters, and to say that you could n't take me back."

"But you don't ask me if *I* love you?"

"But you do — you could n't help it now," she said confidently.

What could he do but reply as illogically with a closer embrace, albeit a slight tremor, as if a cold wind had blown across the open window, passed over him. She may have felt it too, for she presently said, "Kiss me and let me go."

"But we must have a longer talk, darling — when — when — others are not waiting."

"Do you know the far barn near the boundary?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I used to take your books there, afternoons to — to — be with you," she whispered, "and paw gave orders that no one was to come nigh it while I was there. Come to-morrow, just before sundown."

A long embrace followed, in which all that they had not said seemed, to them at least, to become articulate on their tremulous and clinging lips. Then they separated, he unlocking the door softly to give her egress that way. She caught up a book from a desk in passing, and then slipped like a rosy shaft of the coming dawn across the fading moonlight, and a moment after her slow voice, without a tremor of excitement, was heard calling to her companions.

CHAPTER VII

The conversation which Johnny Filgee had overheard between Uncle Ben and the gorgeous stranger, although unintelligible to his infant mind, was fraught with some significance to the adult settlers of Indian Spring. The town itself, like most interior settlements, was originally a mining encampment, and as such its founders and settlers derived their possession of the soil under the mining laws that took precedence of all other titles. But although that title was held to be good even after the abandonment of their original occupation, and the establishment of shops, offices, and dwellings on the site of the deserted places, the suburbs of the town and outlying districts were more precariously held by squatters, under the presumption of their being public land open to preëmption, or the settlement of school-land warrants upon them. Few of the squatters had taken the trouble to perfect even these easy titles, merely holding "possession" for agricultural or domiciliary purposes, and subject only to the invasion of "jumpers," a class of adventurers who, in the abeyance of recognized legal title, "jumped" or forcibly seized such portions of a squatter's domains as were not protected by fencing or superior force. It was therefore with some excitement that Indian Spring received the news that a Mexican grant of three square leagues, which covered the whole district, had been lately confirmed by the government, and that action would be taken to recover possession. It was understood that it would not affect the adverse possessions held by the town under the mining laws, but it would compel the

adjacent squatters like McKinstry, Davis, Masters, and Filgee, and jumpers like the Harrisons, to buy the legal title, or defend a slow but losing lawsuit. The holders of the grant — rich capitalists of San Francisco — were open to compromise to those in actual possession, and in the benefits of this compromise the unscrupulous "jumper," who had neither sown nor reaped, but simply dispossessed the squatter who had done both, shared equally with him.

A diversity of opinion as to the effect of the new claim naturally obtained; the older settlers still clung to their experiences of an easy aboriginal holding of the soil, and were skeptical both as to the validity and justice of these revived alien grants; but the newer arrivals hailed this certain tenure of legal titles as a guarantee to capital and an incentive to improvement. There was also a growing and influential party of Eastern and Northern men, who were not sorry to see a fruitful source of dissension and bloodshed removed. The feuds of the McKinstrys and Harrisons, kept alive over a boundary to which neither had any legal claim, would seem to bring them hereafter within the statute law regarding ordinary assaults without any ethical mystification. On the other hand McKinstry and Harrison would each be able to arrange any compromise with the new title holders for the lands they possessed, or make over that "actual possession" for a consideration. It was feared that both men, being naturally lawless, would unite to render any legal eviction a long and dangerous process, and that they would either be left undisturbed till the last, or would force a profitable concession. But a greater excitement followed when it was known that a section of the land had already been sold by the owners of the grant, that this section exactly covered the debatable land of the McKinstry-Harrison boundaries, and that the new landlord would at once attempt its legal possession. The inspiration of genius that had thus effected a division of the Harrison-McKinstry

combination at its one weak spot excited even the admiration of the skeptics. No one in Indian Spring knew its real author, for the suit was ostensibly laid in the name of a San Francisco banker. But the intelligent reader of Johnny Filgee's late experience during the celebration will have already recognized Uncle Ben as the man, and it becomes a part of this veracious chronicle at this moment to allow him to explain, not only his intentions, but the means by which he carried them out, in his own words.

It was one afternoon at the end of his usual solitary lesson, and the master and Uncle Ben were awaiting the arrival of Rupert. Uncle Ben's educational progress lately, through dint of slow tenacity, had somewhat improved, and he had just completed from certain forms and examples in a book before him a "Letter to a Consignee" informing him that he, Uncle Ben, had just shipped "2 cwt. Ivory Elephant Tusks, 80 peculs of rice and 400bbls. prime mess pork from Indian Spring;" and another beginning "Honored Madam," and conveying in admirably artificial phraseology the "lamented decease" of the lady's husband from yellow fever, contracted on the Gold Coast, and Uncle Ben was surveying his work with critical satisfaction when the master, somewhat impatiently, consulted his watch. Uncle Ben looked up.

"I oughter told ye that Rupe did n't kalkilate to come to-day."

"Indeed — why not?"

"I reckon because I told him he need n't. I allowed to — to hev a little private talk with ye, Mr. Ford, if ye did n't mind."

Mr. Ford's face did not shine with invitation. "Very well," he said, "only remember I have an engagement this afternoon."

"But that ain't until about sundown," said Uncle Ben quietly. "I won't keep ye ez long ez that."

Mr. Ford glanced quickly at Uncle Ben with a rising color. "What do you know of my engagements?" he said sharply.

"Nothin', Mr. Ford," returned Uncle Ben simply; "but hevin' bin layin' round, lookin' for ye here and at the hotel for four or five days allus about that time and not findin' you, I rather kalkilated you might hev suthin' reg'lar on hand."

There was certainly nothing in his face or manner to indicate the least evasion or deceit, or indeed anything but his usual *naïveté*, perhaps a little perturbed and preoccupied by what he was going to say. "I had an idea of writin' you a letter," he continued, "kinder combinin' practice and confidential information, you know. To be square with you, Mr. Ford, in pint of fact, I 've got it *here*. But ez it don't seem to entirely gibe with the facts, and leaves a heap o' things onsaid and onseen, perhaps it 's just ez wall ez I read it to you myself — putten' in a word here and there, and explainin' it gin'rally. Do you sabe?"

The master nodded, and Uncle Ben drew from his desk a rude portfolio made from the two covers of a dilapidated atlas, and took from between them a piece of blotting-paper, which through inordinate application had acquired the color and consistency of a slate, and a few pages of copy-book paper, that to the casual glance looked like sheets of exceedingly difficult music. Surveying them with a blending of chirographic pride, orthographic doubt, and the bashful consciousness of a literary amateur, he traced each line with a forefinger inked to the second joint, and slowly read aloud as follows: —

"'Mr. Ford, Teacher.

"'Dear Sir, — Yours of the 12th rec'd and contents noted.'" ("I did n't," explained Uncle Ben parenthetically, "receive any letter of yours, but I thought I might heave in that beginning from copy for practice. The rest is *me*.")

"'In refference to my having munney,'" continued Uncle

Ben, reading and pointing each word as he read, "'and being able to buy Ditch Stocks an' Land'" —

"One moment," said Mr. Ford interrupting, "I thought you were going to leave out copy. Come to what you have to say."

"But I *hev* — this is all real now. Hold on and you'll see," said Uncle Ben. He resumed with triumphant emphasis: —

"'When it were gin'rally allowed that I haddent a red cent, I want to explain to you Mister Ford for the first time a secret. This here is how it was done. When I first came to Injian Spring, I settled down into the old Palmetto claim, near a heap of old tailings. Knowin' it were against rools, and reg'lar Chinyman's bizness to work them I didd n't let on to enyboddy what I did — witch wos to turn over some of the quarts what I thought was likely and Orrifferus. Doing this I kem uppon some pay ore which them Palmetto fellers had overlookt, or more likely had kaved in uppon them from the bank onknown. Workin' at it in od times by and large, sometimes afore sun-up and sometimes after sundown, and all the time keeping up a day's work on the clame for a show to the boys, I emassed a honist fortun in 2 years of 50,000 dolers and still am. But it will be askd by the incredjulos Reeder How did you never let out anything to Injian Spring, and How did you get rid of your yeald? Mister Ford, the Anser is I took it twist a month on hossback over to La Port and sent it by express to a bank in Sacramento, givin' the name of Daubigny, witch no one in La Port took for me. The Ditch Stok and the Land was all took in the same name, hens the secret was onreviled to the General Eye — stop a minit,'" he interrupted himself quickly as the master in an accession of impatient skepticism was about to break in upon him, "it ain't all." Then dropping his voice to a tremulous and almost funereal climax, he went on: —

"'Thus we see that pashent indurstry is Rewarded in Spite of Mining Rools and Reggylashuns, and Predgudisses agin Furrin Labor is played out and fleeth like a shad-or contenueyeth not long in One Spot, and that a Man may appear to be off no Account and yet Emass that which is far abov rubles and Fadith not Away.

"'Hoppin' for a continneyance
"'of your fevors I remain,
"'Yours to command,
"'Benj D'Aubigny.'"

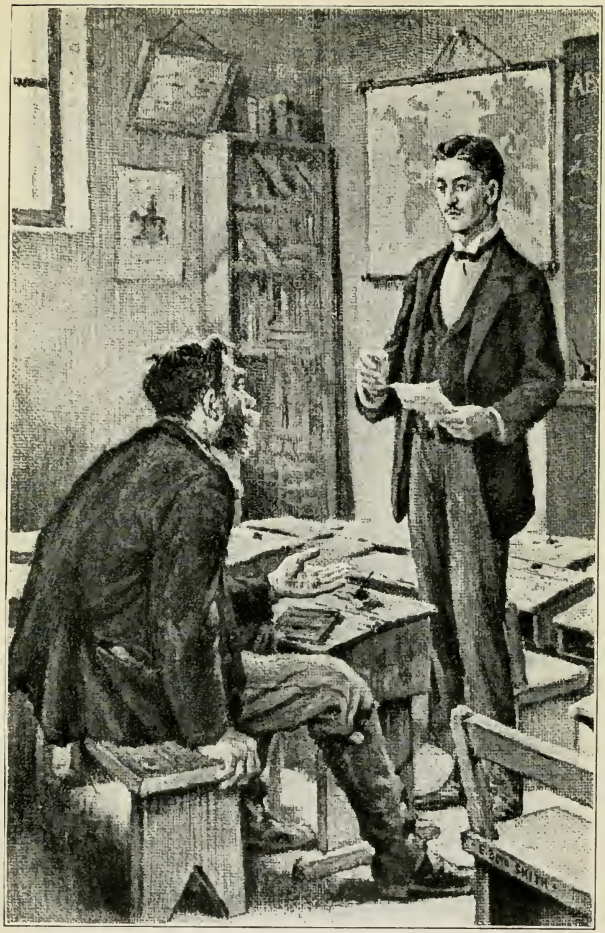
The gloomy satisfaction with which Uncle Ben regarded this peroration — a satisfaction that actually appeared to be equal to the revelation itself — only corroborated the master's indignant doubts.

"Come," he said, impulsively taking the paper from Uncle Ben's reluctant hand, "how much of this is a concoction of yours and Rupe's — and how much is a true story? Do you really mean" —

"Hold on, Mr. Ford!" interrupted Uncle Ben, suddenly fumbling in the breast pocket of his red shirt, "I reckoned on your being a little hard with me, remembering our first talk 'bout these things — so I allowed I 'd bring you some proof." Slowly extracting a long legal envelope from his pocket, he opened it, and drew out two or three crisp certificates of stock, and handed them to the master.

"Ther 's one hundred shares made out to Benj Daubigny. I 'd hev brought you over the deed of the land too, but ez it 's rather hard to read off-hand, on account of the law palaver, I 've left it ap at the shanty to tackle at odd times by way of practicing. But ef you like we 'll go up thar, and I 'll show it to you."

Still haunted by his belief in Uncle Ben's small duplicities, Mr. Ford hesitated. These were certainly *bona fide* certificates of stock made out to "Daubigny." But he had



HOW MUCH IS A TRUE STORY

never actually accepted Uncle Ben's statement of his identity with that person, and now it was offered as a corroboration of a still more improbable story. He looked at Uncle Ben's simple face slightly deepening in color under his scrutiny — perhaps with conscious guilt.

"Have you made anybody your confidant? Rupe, for instance?" he asked significantly.

"In course not," replied Uncle Ben, with a slight stiffening of wounded pride. "On'y yourself, Mr. Ford, and the young fellow Stacey from the bank — ez was obligated to know it. In fact, I wos kalkilatin' to ask you to help me talk to him about that yer boundary land."

Mr. Ford's skepticism was at last staggered. Any practical joke or foolish complicity between the agent of the bank and a man like Uncle Ben was out of the question, and if the story were his own sole invention, he would have scarcely dared to risk so accessible and uncompromising a denial as the agent had it in his power to give.

He held out his hand to Uncle Ben. "Let me congratulate you," he said heartily, "and forgive me if your story really sounded so wonderful I could n't quite grasp it. Now let me ask you something more. Have you had any reason for keeping this a secret, other than your fear of confessing that you violated a few bigoted and idiotic mining rules — which, after all, are binding only upon sentiment — and which your success has proved to be utterly impractical?"

"There *was* another reason, Mr. Ford," said Uncle Ben, wiping away an embarrassed smile with the back of his hand, "that is, to be square with you, *why* I thought of consultin' you. I did n't keer to have McKinstry, and" — he added hurriedly, "in course Harrison, too, know that I bought up the title to thar boundary."

"I understand," nodded the master. "I should n't think you would."

"Why should n't ye?" asked Uncle Ben quickly.

"Well — I don't suppose you care to quarrel with two passionate men."

Uncle Ben's face changed. Presently, however, with his hand to his face, he managed to manipulate another smile, only it appeared for the purpose of being as awkwardly wiped away.

"Say *one* passionate man, Mr. Ford."

"Well, one if you like," returned the master cheerfully. "But for the matter of that, why any? Come — do you mind telling me why you bought the land at all? You know it 's of little value to any but McKinstry and Harrison."

"Soppose," said Uncle Ben slowly, with a great affectation of wiping his ink-spotted desk with his sleeve, — "soppose that I had got kinder tired of seein' McKinstry and Harrison allus fightin' and scrimmagin' over their boundary line. Soppose I kalkilated that it warn't the sort o' thing to induce folks to settle here. Soppose I reckoned that by gettin' the real title in my hands I 'd have the dead-wood on both o' them, and settle the thing my own way, eh?"

"That certainly was a very laudable intention," returned Mr. Ford, observing Uncle Ben curiously, "and from what you said just now about one passionate man, I suppose you have determined already *who* to favor. I hope your public spirit will be appreciated by Indian Spring at least — if it is n't by those two men."

"You lay low and keep dark and you 'll see," returned his companion, with a hopefulness of speech which his somewhat anxious eagerness however did not quite bear out. "But you 're not goin' yet, surely," he added, as the master again absently consulted his watch. "It 's on'y half past four. It 's true thar ain't any more to tell," he added simply, "but I had an idea that you might hev took to this yer little story of mine more than you 'pear to be, and might

be askin' questions and kinder bedevlin' me with jokes ez to what I was goin' to do — and all that. But p'r'aps it don't seem so wonderful to you arter all. Come to think of it — squarely now," he said, with a singular despondency, "I 'm rather sick of it myself — eh ?"

"My dear old boy," said Ford, grasping both his hands, with a swift revulsion of shame at his own utterly selfish abstraction, "I am overjoyed at your good luck. More than that, I can say honestly, old fellow, that it could n't have fallen in more worthy hands, or to any one whose good fortune would have pleased me more. There ! And if I 've been slow and stupid in taking it in, it is because it 's so wonderful, so like a fairy tale of virtue rewarded — as if you were a kind of male Cinderella, old man !" He had no intention of lying — he had no belief that he was; he had only forgotten that his previous impressions and hesitations had arisen from the very fact that he *did* doubt the consistency of the story with his belief in Uncle Ben's weakness. But he thought himself now so sincere that the generous reader, who no doubt is ready to hail the perfect equity of his neighbor's good luck, will readily forgive him.

In the plenitude of this sincerity, Ford threw himself at full length on one of the long benches, and with a gesture invited Uncle Ben to make himself equally at his ease. "Come," he said, with boyish gayety, "let 's hear your plans, old man. To begin with, who 's to share them with you ? Of course there are 'the old folks at home' first; then you have brothers — and perhaps sisters ?" He stopped and glanced with a smile at Uncle Ben; the idea of there being a possible female of his species struck his fancy.

Uncle Ben, who had hitherto always exercised a severe restraint — partly from respect and partly from caution — over his long limbs in the schoolhouse, here slowly lifted one leg over another bench, and sat himself astride of it, leaning forward on his elbow, his chin resting between his hands.

"As far as the old folks goes, Mr. Ford, I 'm a kind of orphan."

"A *kind* of orphan ?" echoed Ford.

"Yes," said Uncle Ben, leaning heavily on his chin, so that the action of his jaws with the enunciation of each word slightly jerked his head forward as if he were imparting confidential information to the bench before him. "Yes, that is, you see, I 'm all right ez far as the old man goes — *he's* dead; died way back in Mizzouri. But ez to my mother, it 's sorter betwixt and between — kinder unsartain. You see, Mr. Ford, she went off with a city feller — an entire stranger to me — afore the old man died, and that 's wot broke up my schoolin'. Now whether she 's here, there, or yon, can't be found out, though Squire Tompkins allowed — and he were a lawyer — that the old man could get a divorce if he wanted, and that you see would make me a whole orphan, ef I keerd to prove title, ez the lawyers say. Well — that sorter lets the old folks out. Then my brother was onc't drowned in the North Platt, and I never had any sisters. That don't leave much family for plannin' about — does it ?"

"No," said the master reflectively, gazing at Uncle Ben, "unless you avail yourself of your advantages now and have one of your own. I suppose now that you are rich, you 'll marry."

Uncle Ben slightly changed his position, and then with his finger and thumb began to apparently feed himself with certain crumbs which had escaped from the children's luncheon-baskets and were still lying on the bench. Intent on this occupation and without raising his eyes to the master, he returned slowly, "Well, you see, I 'm sorter married already."

The master sat up quickly.

"What, *you* married — now ?"

"Well, perhaps that 's a question. It 's a good deal like

my beein' an orphan — oncertain and onsettled." He paused to pursue an evasive crumb to the end of the bench and having captured it, went on: "It was when I was younger than you be, and she warn't very old neither. But she knew a heap more than I did; and ez to readin' and writin', she was thar, I tell you, every time. You 'd hev admired to see her, Mr. Ford." As he paused here as if he had exhausted the subject, the master said impatiently, "Well, where is she now?"

Uncle Ben shook his head slowly. "I ain't seen her sens I left Mizzouri, goin' on five years ago."

"But why have n't you? What was the matter?" persisted the master.

"Well — you see — I runned away. Not *she*, you know, but *I* — *I* scooted, skedaddled out here."

"But what for?" asked the master, regarding Uncle Ben with hopeless wonder. "Something must have happened. What was it? Was she" —

"She was a good schollard," said Uncle Ben gravely, "and allowed to be sech, by all. She stood about so high," he continued, indicating with his hand a medium height. "War little and dark complected."

"But you must have had some reason for leaving her?"

"I 've sometimes had an idea," said Uncle Ben cautiously, "that mebbee runnin' away ran in some fam'lies. Now, there war my mother run off with an entire stranger, and yer 's me ez run off by myself. And what makes it the more one-like is that jest as dad allus allowed he could get a devorce agin mother, so my wife could hev got one agin me for leavin' her. And it 's almost an even-handed game that she hez. It 's there where the oncertainty comes in."

"But are you satisfied to remain in this doubt? or do you propose, now that you are able, to institute a thorough search for her?"

"I was kalkilatin' to look around a little," said Uncle Ben simply.

"And return to her if you find her?" continued the master.

"I did n't say that, Mr. Ford."

"But if she has n't got a divorce from you that 's what you 'll have to do, and what you ought to do — if I understand your story. For by your own showing, a more causeless, heartless, and utterly inexcusable desertion than yours I never heard of."

"Do you think so?" said Uncle Ben, with exasperating simplicity.

"Do *I* think so?" repeated Mr. Ford indignantly. "Everybody 'll think so. They can't think otherwise. You say you deserted her, and you admit she did nothing to provoke it."

"No," returned Uncle Ben quickly, "nothin'. Did I tell you, Mr. Ford, that she could play the pianner and sing?"

"No," said Mr. Ford curtly, rising impatiently and crossing the room. He was more than half convinced that Uncle Ben was deceiving him. Either under the veil of his hide-bound simplicity he was an utterly selfish, heartless, secretive man, or else he was telling an idiotic falsehood.

"I 'm sorry I can neither congratulate you nor condole with you on what you have just told me. I cannot see that you have the least excuse for delaying a single moment to search for your wife and make amends for your conduct. And if you want my opinion it strikes me as being a much more honorable way of employing your new riches than mediating in your neighbors' squabbles. But it 's getting late and I 'm afraid we must bring our talk to an end. I hope you 'll think this over before we meet again — and think differently."

Nevertheless, as they both left the schoolhouse, Mr. Ford lingered over the locking of the door to give Uncle Ben a final chance for further explanation. But none came. The new capitalist of Indian Spring regarded him with an intensification of his usual half-sad, half-embarrassed smile, and only said, "You understand this yer's a secret, Mr. Ford?"

"Certainly," said Ford, with ill-concealed irritation.

"'Bout my bein' sorter married?"

"Don't be alarmed," he responded dryly; "it's not a taking story."

They separated; Uncle Ben, more than ever involved in his usual unsatisfactory purposes, wending his way towards his riches; the master lingering to observe his departure before he plunged, in virtuous superiority, into the woods that fringed the Harrison and McKinstry boundaries.

CHAPTER VIII

The religious attitude which Mrs. McKinstry had assumed towards her husband's weak civilized tendencies was not entirely free from human rancor. That strong loyal nature which had unsexed itself in the one idea of duty, now that duty seemed to be no longer appreciated took refuge in her forgotten womanhood and in the infinitesimally small arguments, resources, and manœuvres at its command. She had conceived a singular jealousy of this daughter who had changed her husband's nature, and who had supplanted the traditions of the household life; she had acquired an exaggerated depreciation of those feminine charms which had never been a factor in her own domestic happiness. She saw in her husband's desire to mitigate the savage austerities of their habits only a weak concession to the powers of beauty and adornment — degrading vanities she had never known in their lifelong struggle for frontier supremacy — that had never brought them victorious out of that struggle. "Frizzles," "furblows," and "fancy fixin's" had never helped them in their exodus across the plains; had never taken the place of swift eyes, quick ears, strong hands, and endurance; had never nursed the sick or bandaged the wounded. When envy or jealousy invades the female heart after forty it is apt to bring a bitterness which knows no attenuating compensation in that coquetry, emulation, passionate appeal, or innocent tenderness, which makes tolerable the jealous caprices of the younger woman. The struggle for rivalry is felt to be hopeless, the power of imitation is gone. Of her forgotten womanhood Mrs. McKin-

stry revived only a capacity to suffer meanly and inflict mean suffering upon others. In the ruined castle of her youth, and the falling in of banqueting-hall and bower, the dungeon and torture-chamber appeared to have been left, or, to use her own metaphor, she had querulously complained to the parson that, "accordin' to some folks, she mout hev bin the barren fig-tree e-lected to bear persimmums."

Her methods were not entirely different from those employed by her suffering sisterhood in like emergencies. The unlucky Hiram, "worrited by stock," was hardly placated or consoled by learning from her that it was only the result of his own weakness, acting upon the cussedness of the stock-dispersing Harrisons; the perplexity into which he was thrown by the news of the new legal claim to his land was not soothed by the suggestion that it was a trick of that Yankee civilization to which he was meanly succumbing. She who had always been a rough but devoted nurse in sickness was now herself overtaken by vague irregular disorders which involved the greatest care and the absence of all exciting causes. The attendance of McKinstry and Cressy at a "crazy quilting party" had brought on "blind chills;" the importation of a melodeon for Cressy to play on had superinduced an "innerd rash," and a threatened attack of "palsy creeps" had only been warded off by the timely postponement of an evening party suggested by her daughter. The old nomadic instinct, morbidly excited by her discontent, caused her to lay artful plans for a further emigration. She knew she had the germs of "mash fever" caught from the adjacent river; she related mysterious information, gathered in "class meeting," of the superior facilities for stock raising on the higher foot-hills; she resuscitated her dead and gone Missouri relations in her daily speech, to a manifest invidious comparison with the living; she revived even the incidents of her early married life with the same baleful intent. The acquisition of a few "biled shirts"

by Hiram for festive appearances with Cressy painfully reminded her that he had married her in "hickory;" she further accented the change by herself appearing in her oldest clothes, on the hypothesis that it was necessary for some one to keep up the traditions of the past.

Her attitude towards Cressy would have been more decided had she ever possessed the slightest influence over her, or had even understood her with the intuitive sympathies of the maternal relations. Yet she went so far as to even openly regret the breaking off of the match with Seth Davis, whose family, at least, still retained the habits and traditions she revered; but she was promptly silenced by her husband informing her that words "that had to be tuk back" had already passed between him and Seth's father, and that, according to those same traditions, blood was more likely to be spilled than mingled. Whether she was only withheld from attempting a reconciliation herself through lack of tact and opportunity remains to be seen. For the present she encouraged Masters's attentions under a new and vague idea that a flirtation which distracted Cressy from her studies was displeasing to McKinstry and inimical to his plans. Blindly ignorant of Mr. Ford's possible relations to her daughter, and suspecting nothing, she felt towards him only a dull aversion as being the senseless pivot of her troubles. Seeing no one, and habitually closing her ears to any family allusion to Cressy's social triumphs, she was unaware of even the popular admiration their memorable waltz had excited.

On the morning of the day that Uncle Ben had confided to the master his ingenious plan for settling the boundary disputes, the barking of McKinstry's yellow dog announced the approach of a stranger to the ranch. It proved to be Mr. Stacey — not only as dazzlingly arrayed as when he first rose above Johnny Filgee's horizon, but wearing, in addition to his jaunty business air, a look of complacent

expectation of the pretty girl whom he had met at the ball. He had not seen her for a month. It was a happy inspiration of his own that enabled him to present himself that morning in the twin functions of a victorious Mercury and Apollo.

McKinstry had to be summoned from an adjacent meadow, while Cressy, in the mean time, undertook to entertain the gallant stranger. This was easily done. It was part of her fascinations that, disdaining the ordinary, real, or assumed ignorance of the *ingénue* of her class, she generally exhibited to her admirers (with perhaps the single exception of the master) a laughing consciousness of the state of mind into which her charms had thrown them. She understood their passion if she could not accept it. This to a bashful rustic community was helpful, but in the main unsatisfactory; with advances so promptly unmasked, the most strategic retreat was apt to become an utter rout. Leaning against the lintel of the door, her curved hand shading the sparkling depths of her eyes, and the sunlight striking down upon the pretty curves of her languid figure, she awaited the attack.

"I have n't seen you, Miss Cressy, since we danced together — a month ago."

"That was mighty rough papers," said Cressy, who was purposely dialectical to strangers, "considering that you traipsed up and down the lane, past the house, twice yesterday."

"Then you saw me?" said the young man, with a slightly discomfited laugh.

"I did. And so did the hound, and so, I reckon, did Joe Masters and the hired man. And when you pranced back on the home stretch, there was the hound, Masters, the hired man, and maw all on your trail, and paw bringin' up the rear with a shot-gun. There was about a half a mile of you altogether." She removed her hand from her

eyes to indicate with a lazily graceful sweep this somewhat imaginative procession, and laughed.

"You are certainly well guarded," said Stacey hesitatingly; "and looking at you, Miss Cressy," he added boldly, "I don't wonder at it."

"Well, it *is* reckoned that next to paw's boundaries I 'm pretty well protected from squatters and jumpers."

Forceful and quaint as her language was, the lazy sweetness of her intonation, and the delicate refinement of her face, more than atoned for it. It was unconventional and picturesque as her gestures. So at least thought Mr. Stacey, and it emboldened him to further gallantry.

"Well, Miss Cressy, as my business with your father to-day was to try to effect a compromise of his boundary claims, perhaps you might accept my services in your own behalf."

"Which means," responded the young lady pertly, "the same thing to *me* as to paw. No trespassers but yourself. Thank you, sir." She twirled lightly on her heel and dropped him that exaggerated curtsy known to the schoolchildren as a "cheese." It permitted in its progress the glimpse of a pretty little slipper which completed his subjugation.

"Well, if it 's only a fair compromise," he began laughingly.

"Compromise means somebody giving up. Who is it?" she asked.

The infatuated Stacey had reached the point of thinking this repartee if possible more killing than his own.

"Ha! That 's for Miss Cressy to say."

But the young lady leaning back against the lintel with the comfortable ease of being irresponsibly diverted, sagely pointed out that that was the function of the arbitrator.

"Ah well, suppose we begin by giving up Seth Davis, eh? You see that I 'm pretty well posted, Miss Cressy."

"You alarm me," said Cressy sweetly. "But I reckon he *had* given up."

"He was in the running that night at the ball. Looked half savage while I was dancing with you. Wanted to eat me."

"Poor Seth! And he used to be *so* particular in his food," said the witty Cressy.

Mr. Stacey was convulsed. "And there 's Mr. Dabney — Uncle Ben," he continued, "eh? Very quiet but very sly. A dark horse, eh? Pretends to take lessons for the sake of being near some one, eh? Would he were a boy again because somebody else is a girl?"

"I should be frightened of you if you lived here always," returned Cressy, with invincible *naïveté;* "but perhaps then you would n't know so much."

Stacey simply accepted this as a compliment. "And there 's Masters," he said insinuatingly.

"Not Joe?" said Cressy, with a low laugh, turning her eyes to the door.

"Yes," said Stacey, with a quick, uneasy smile. "Ah! I see we must n't drop *him.* Is he out *there?*" he added, trying to follow the direction of her eyes.

But the young girl kept her face studiously averted. "Is that all?" she asked after a pause.

"Well — there 's that solemn schoolmaster, who cut me out of the waltz with you — that Mr. Ford."

Had he been a perfectly cool and impartial observer he would have seen the slight tremor cross Cressy's soft eyelids even in profile, followed by that momentary arrest of her whole face, mouth, dimples, and eyes, which had overtaken it the night the master entered the ballroom. But he was neither, and it passed quickly and unnoticed. Her usual lithe but languid play of expression and color came back, and she turned her head lazily towards the speaker. "There 's paw coming. I suppose you would n't mind

giving me a sample of your style of arbitrating with him, before you try it on me?"

"Certainly not," said Stacey, by no means displeased at the prospect of having so pretty and intelligent a witness in the daughter of what he believed would form an attractive display of his diplomatic skill and graciousness to the father. "Don't go away. I've got nothing to say Miss Cressy could not understand and answer."

The jingling of spurs, and the shadow of McKinstry and his shot-gun falling at this moment between the speaker and Cressy, spared her the necessity of a reply. McKinstry cast an uneasy glance around the apartment, and not seeing Mrs. McKinstry looked relieved, and even the deep traces of the loss of a valuable steer that morning partly faded from his Indian-red complexion. He placed his shot-gun carefully in the corner, took his soft felt hat from his head, folded it, and put it in one of the capacious pockets of his jacket, turned to his daughter, and laying his maimed hand familiarly on her shoulder, said gravely, without looking at Stacey, "What might the stranger be wantin', Cress?"

"Perhaps I'd better answer that myself," said Stacey briskly. "I'm acting for Benham and Co., of San Francisco, who have bought the Spanish title to part of this property. I"—

"Stop there!" said McKinstry in a voice dull but distinct. He took his hat from his pocket, put it on, walked to the corner and took up his gun, looked at Stacey for the first time with narcotic eyes that seemed to drowsily absorb his slight figure, then put the gun back half contemptuously, and with a wave of his hand towards the door, said, "We 'll settle this yer outside. Cress, you stop in here. There 's man's talk goin' on."

"But, paw," said Cressy, laying her hand languidly on her father's sleeve without the least change of color or amused expression, "this gentleman has come over here on a compromise."

"On a — *which?*" said McKinstry, glancing scornfully out of the door for some rare species of mustang vaguely suggested to him in that unfamiliar word.

"To see if we could n't come to some fair settlement," said Stacey. "I've no objection to going outside with you, but I think we can discuss this matter here just as well." His fine feathers had not made him a coward, although his heart had beaten a little faster at this sudden recollection of the dangerous reputation of his host.

"Go on," said McKinstry.

"The plain facts of the case are these," continued Stacey, with more confidence. "We have sold a strip of this property covering the land in dispute between you and Harrison. We are bound to put our purchaser in peaceable possession. Now to save time we are willing to buy that possession of any man who can give it. We are told that you can."

"Well, considerin' that for the last four years I 've been fightin' night and day agin them low-down Harrisons for it, I reckon you 've been lied to," said McKinstry deliberately. "Why — except the clearing on the north side, whar I put up a barn, thar ain't an acre of it as has n't been shifted first this side and then that as fast ez I druv boundary stakes and fences, and the Harrisons pulled 'em up agin. Thar ain't more than fifty acres ez I 've hed a clear hold on, and I would n't hev had that ef it had n't bin for the barn, the raisin' alone o' which cost me a man, two horses, and this yer little finger."

"Put us in possession of even that fifty acres, and *we 'll* undertake to hold the rest and eject those Harrisons from it," returned Stacey complacently. "You understand that the moment we 've made a peaceable entrance to even a foothold on your side, the Harrisons are only trespassers, and with the title to back us we can call on the whole sheriff's posse to put them off. That 's the law."

"That ar the law?" repeated McKinstry meditatively.

"Yes," said Stacey. "So," he continued, with a self-satisfied smile to Cressy, "far from being hard on you, Mr. McKinstry, we're rather inclined to put you on velvet. We offer you a fair price for the only thing you can give us — actual possession; and we help you with your old grudge against the Harrisons. We not only clear them out, but we pay *you* for even the part they held adversely to you."

Mr. McKinstry passed his three whole fingers over his forehead and eyes as if troubled by a drowsy aching. "Then you don't reckon to hev anythin' to say to them Harrisons?"

"We don't propose to recognize them in the matter at all," returned Stacey.

"Nor allow 'em anythin'?"

"Not a cent! So you see, Mr. McKinstry," he continued magnanimously, yet with a mischievous smile to Cressy, "there is nothing in this amicable discussion that requires to be settled outside."

"Ain't there?" said McKinstry in a dull, deliberate voice, raising his eyes for the second time to Stacey. They were bloodshot, with a heavy, hanging furtiveness, not unlike one of his own hunted steers. "But I ain't kam enuff in yer." He moved to the door with a beckoning of his fateful hand. "Outside a minit — *ef* you please."

Stacey started, shrugged his shoulders, and half defiantly stepped beyond the threshold. Cressy, unchanged in color or expression, lazily followed to the door.

"Wot," said McKinstry, slowly facing Stacey — "wot ef I refoose? Wot ef I say I don't allow any man, or any bank, or any compromise, to take up my quo'ls? Wot ef I say that low down and mean as them Harrisons is, they don't begin to be ez mean, ez low down, ez underhanded, ez sneakin' ez that yer compromise? Wot ef I

say that ef that 's the kind o' hogwash that law and snivelization offers me for peace and quietness, I 'll take the fightin', and the law-breakin', and the sheriff, and all h—ll for his posse instead? Wot ef I say that?"

"It will only be my duty to repeat it," said Stacey, with an affected carelessness which, however, did not conceal his surprise and his discomfiture. "It's no affair of mine."

"Unless," said Cressy, assuming her old position against the lintel of the door, and smoothing the worn bear-skin that served as a mat with the toe of her slipper, — "unless you 've mixed it up with your other arbitration, you know."

"Wot other arbitration?" asked McKinstry suddenly, with murky eyes.

Stacey cast a rapid, half-indignant glance at the young girl, who received it with her hands tucked behind her back, her lovely head bent submissively forward, and a prolonged little laugh.

"Oh, nothing, paw," she said, "only a little private foolishness betwixt me and the gentleman. You 'd admire to hear him talk, paw — about other things than business. He 's just that chipper and gay."

Nevertheless, as with a muttered "good-morning" the young fellow turned away, she quietly brushed past her father, and followed him — with her hands still penitently behind her, and the rosy palms turned upward — as far as the gate. Her single long Marguerite braid of hair, trailing down her back nearly to the hem of her skirt, appeared to accent her demure reserve. At the gate she shaded her eyes with her hand, and glanced upward.

"It don't seem to be a good day for arbitrating. A trifle early in the season, ain't it?"

"Good-morning, Miss McKinstry."

She held out her hand. He took it with an affected

ease but cautiously, as if it had been the velvet paw of a young panther who had scratched him. After all, what was she but the cub of the untamed beast, McKinstry? He was well out of it! He was not revengeful — but business was business, and he had given them the first chance.

As his figure disappeared behind the buckeyes of the lane, Cressy cast a glance at the declining sun. She reëntered the house, and went directly to her room. As she passed the window, she could see her father already remounted galloping towards the tules, as if in search of that riparian "kam" his late interview had disturbed. A few straggling bits of color in the sloping meadows were the children coming home from school. She hastily tied a girlish sunbonnet under her chin, and slipping out of the back door, swept like a lissom shadow along the line of fence until she seemed to melt into the umbrage of the woods that fringed the distant north boundary.

CHAPTER IX

MEANWHILE, unaware of her husband's sudden relapse to her old border principles and of the visit that had induced it, Mrs. McKinstry was slowly returning from a lugubrious recital of her moods and feelings at the parson's. As she crossed the barren flat and reached the wooded upland midway between the schoolhouse and the ranch, she saw before her the old familiar figure of Seth Davis lounging on the trail. In her habitual loyalty to her husband's feuds she would probably have stalked defiantly past him, notwithstanding her late regrets of the broken engagement, but Seth began to advance awkwardly towards her. In fact, he had noticed the tall, gaunt, plaid-shawled and holland-bonneted figure approaching, and had waited for it.

As he seemed intent upon getting in her way she stopped and raised her right hand warningly before her. In spite of the shawl and the sunbonnet, suffering had implanted a rude Runic dignity to her attitude. "Words that hev to be took back, Seth Davis," she said hastily, "hev passed between you and my man. Out of my way, then, that I may pass, too."

"Not much betwixt you and me, Aunt Rachel," he said, with slouching deprecation, using the old household title by which he had familiarly known her. "I 've nothin' agin you — and I kin prove it by wot I 'm yer to say. And I ain't trucklin' to yer for myself, for ez far ez me and your'n ez concerned," he continued, with a malevolent glance, "thar ain't gold enough in Caleforny to mak the weddin'-ring that could hitch me and Cress together. I

want to tell you that you 're bein' played ; that you 're bein' befooled and bamboozled and honey-fogled. Thet while you 're groanin' at class-meetin' and Hiram 's quo'lin' with dad, and Joe Masters waitin' round to pick up any bone that 's throwed him, that sneakin,' hypocritical Yankee schoolmaster is draggin' your daughter to h—ll with him on the sly."

"Quit that, Seth Davis," said Mrs. McKinstry sternly, "or be man enough to tell it to a man. That 's Hiram's business to know."

"And what if he knows it well enough and winks at it? What if he 's willin' enough to truckle to it, to curry favor with them sneakin' Yanks ?" said Seth malignantly.

A spasm of savage conviction seized Mrs. McKinstry. But it was more from her jealous fears of her husband's disloyalty than concern for her daughter's transgression. Nevertheless, she said desperately, "It 's a lie. Where are your proofs ?"

"Proofs ?" returned Seth. "Who is it sneaks around the schoolhouse to have private talks with the schoolmaster, and edges him on with Cressy afore folks ? Your husband. Who goes sneakin' off every arternoon with that same cantin' hound of a schoolmaster ? Your daughter. Who 's been carryin' on together, and hidin' thick enough to be ridden out on a rail together ? Your daughter and the schoolmaster. Proofs ? — ask anybody. Ask the children. Look yar — you, Johnny — come here."

He had suddenly directed his voice to a blackberry bush near the trail, from which the curly head of Johnny Filgee had just appeared. That home-returning infant painfully disengaged himself, his slate, his books, and his small dinner-pail half filled with fruit as immature as himself, and came towards them sideways.

"Yer 's a dime, Johnny, to git some candy," said Seth, endeavoring to distort his passion-set face into a smile.

Johnny Filgee's small, berry-stained palm promptly closed over the coin.

"Now, don't lie. Where 's Cressy ? "

"Kithin' her bo."

"Good boy. What bo ? "

Johnny hesitated. He had once seen the schoolmaster and Cressy together ; he had heard it whispered by the other children that they loved each other. But looking at Seth and Mrs. McKinstry he felt that something more tremendous than this stupid fact was required of him for grown-up people, and being honest and imaginative, he determined that it should be worth the money.

"Speak up, Johnny, don't be afeard to tell."

Johnny was not "afeard" — he was only thinking. He had it ! He remembered that he had just seen his paragon, the brilliant Stacey, coming from the boundary woods. What more poetical and startlingly effective than to connect him with Cressy ? He replied promptly : —

"Mithter Thtathy. He gived her a watch and ring of truly gold. Goin' to be married at Thacramento."

"You lyin' limb," said Seth, seizing him roughly. But Mrs. McKinstry interposed.

"Let that brat go," she said, with gleaming eyes. "I want to talk to you." Seth released Johnny. "It 's a trick," he said, "he 's bin put up to it by that Ford."

But Johnny, after securing a safe vantage behind the blackberry bush, determined to give them another trial — with facts.

"I know mor'n that," he called out.

"Git — you measly pup," said Seth savagely.

"I know Theriff Briggth, he rid over the boundary with a lot o' men and horthes," said Johnny, with that hurried delivery with which he was able to estop interruption. "Theed 'em go by. Maur Harrithon theth his dad 's goin' to chuck out ole McKinthtry. Hooray ! "

Mrs. McKinstry turned her dark face sharply on Seth. "What 's that he sez ?"

"Nothin' but children's gassin'," he answered, meeting her eyes with an evil consciousness half loutish, half defiant, "and ef it war true, it would only sarve Hiram McKinstry right."

She laid her hand upon his shoulder with swift suspicion. "Out o' my way, Seth Davis," she said suddenly, pushing him aside. "Ef this ez any underhanded work of yours, you 'll pay for it."

She strode past him in the direction of Johnny, but at the approach of the tall woman with the angry eyes the boy flew. She hesitated a moment, turned again with a threatening wave of the hand to Seth, and started off rapidly in the direction of the boundary.

She had not placed so much faith in the boy's story as in the vague revelation of evil in Davis's manner. If there was any "cussedness" afoot, Seth, convinced of Cressy's unfaithfulness, and with no further hope of any mediation from the parents, would know it. Unless Hiram had been warned, he was still lulled in his fatuous dream of civilization. At that time he and his men were in the tules with the stock; to be satisfied, she herself must go to the boundary.

She reached the ridge of the cottonwoods and sycamores, and a few hundred yards further brought her to the edge of that gentle southern slope which at last sank into the broad meadow of the debatable ground. In spite of Stacey's invidious criticism of its intrinsic value, this theatre of savage dissension, violence, and bloodshed was by some irony of nature a pastoral landscape of singular and peaceful repose. The soft glacis stretching before her was in spring cerulean with lupines, and later starred with mariposas. The meadow was transversely crossed by a curving line of alders that indicated a rare watercourse, of which in the dry

season only a single pool remained to flash back the unvarying sky. There had been no attempt at cultivation of this broad expanse; wild oats, mustard, and rank grasses left it a tossing sea of turbulent and variegated color whose waves rode high enough to engulf horse and rider in their choking depths. Even the traces of human struggle, the uprooted stakes, scattered fence-rails, and empty post-holes were forever hidden under these billows of verdure. Midway of the field and near the watercourse arose McKinstry's barn — the solitary human structure, whose rude, misshapen, bulging sides and swallow-haunted eaves bursting with hay from the neighboring pasture seemed, however, only an extravagant growth of the prolific soil. Mrs. McKinstry gazed at it anxiously. There was no sign of life or movement near or around it; it stood as it had always stood, deserted and solitary. But turning her eyes to the right, beyond the watercourse, she could see a slight regular undulation of the grassy sea and what appeared to be the drifting on its surface of half a dozen slouched hats in the direction of the alders. There was no longer any doubt; a party from the other side was approaching the border.

A shout and the quick galloping of hoofs behind her sent a thrill of relief to her heart. She had barely time to draw aside as her husband and his followers swept past her down the slope. But it needed not his furious cry, "The Harrisons hev sold us out," to tell her that the crisis had come.

She held her breath as the cavalcade diverged, and in open order furiously approached the watercourse, and she could see a sudden check and hesitation in the movement in the meadow at that unlooked-for onset. Then she thought of the barn. It would be a rallying-point for them if driven back — a tower of defense if besieged. There were arms secreted beneath the hay for such an emergency. She would run there, swing to its open doors, and get ready to barricade them.

She ran crouchingly, seeking the higher grasses and brambles of the ridge to escape observation from the meadow until she could descend upon the barn from the rear. She threw aside her impeding shawl; her brown holland sunbonnet, torn off her head and hanging by its strings from her shoulders, let her coarse silver-threaded hair stream like a mane over her back; her face and hands were bleeding from thorns and whitened by dust. But she struggled on fiercely like some hunted animal until she reached the descending trail, when, letting herself go blindly, only withheld by the long grasses she clutched at wildly on either side, she half fell, half stumbled down the slope and emerged beside the barn, breathless and exhausted.

But what a contrast was there! For an instant she could scarcely believe that she had left the ridge with her husband's savage outcry in her ears, and in her eyes the swift vision of his furious cavalcade. The boundary meadow was hidden by the soft lines of graceful willows in whose dim recesses the figures of the passionate horsemen seemed to have melted forever. There was nothing now to interrupt the long vista of peaceful beauty that stretched before her through this lonely hollow to the distant sleeping hills. The bursting barn in the foreground, heaped with grain that fringed its eaves and bristled from its windows and doors until its unlovely bulk was hidden in trailing feathery outlines; the gentle flutter of wings and soothing twitter of swallows and jays around its open rafters, and the drifting shadows of a few circling crows above it; the drowsy song of bees on the wild mustard that half hid its walls with yellow bloom; the sound of faintly trickling water in one of those old Indian-haunted springs that had given its name to the locality, — all these for an instant touched the senses of this hard, fierce woman as she had not been touched since she was a girl. For one brief moment the joys of peace and that matured repose that never had

been hers flashed upon her; but with it came the savage consciousness that even now it was being wrested away, and the thought fired her blood again. She listened eagerly for a second in the direction of the meadow; there was no report of firearms — there was yet time to prepare the barn for defense. She ran to the front of the building and seized the latch of the half-closed door. A little feminine cry that was half a laugh came from within, with the rapid rustle of a skirt, and as the door swung open a light figure vanished through the rear window. The slanting sunlight falling in the shadowed interior disclosed only the single erect figure of the schoolmaster — John Ford.

The first confusion and embarrassment of an interrupted rendezvous that had colored Ford's cheeks gave way to a look of alarm as he caught sight of the bleeding face and disheveled figure of Mrs. McKinstry. She saw it. To her distorted fancy it seemed only a proof of deeper guilt. Without a word she closed the heavy door behind her and swung the huge cross-bar unaided to its place. She then turned and confronted him, wiping the dust from her face and arms with her torn and dangling sunbonnet in a way that recalled her attitude on the first day he had met her.

"That was Cress with ye?" she said.

He hesitated, still gazing at her in wonder.

"Don't lie."

He started. "I don't propose to," he retorted indignantly. "It was" —

"I don't ask ye how long this yer's bin goin' on," she said, pointing to Cressy's sunbonnet, a few books, and a scattered nosegay of wild flowers lying on the hay; "and I don't want to know. In five minutes either her father will be here, or them hell-hounds of Harrison's who 've sold him out will swarm round this barn to git possesshun. Ef this yer" — she again pointed contemptuously to the objects just indicated — "means that you 've cast your

lot with *us* and kalkilate to take our bitter with our swet , ye 'll lift up that stack of hay and bring out a gun to help defend it. Ef you 're meanin' anythin' else, Ford, you 'll hide yourself in that hay till Hiram comes and has time enough to attend to ye."

"And if I choose to do neither ? " he said haughtily.

She looked at him in unutterable scorn. "There 's the winder — take it while there 's time, afore I bar it. Ef you see Hiram, tell him ye left an old woman behind ye to defend the place whar you uster hide with her darter."

Before he could reply there was a distant report, followed almost directly by another. With a movement of irritation he walked to the window, turned and looked at her — bolted it, and came back.

"Where 's that gun ? " he said almost rudely.

"I reckoned that would fetch ye," she said, dragging away the hay and disclosing a long trough-like box covered with tarpaulin. It proved to contain powder, shot, and two guns. He took one.

"I suppose I may know what I am fighting for ? " he said dryly.

"Ye might say 'Cress' ef they " — indicating the direction of the reports — "happen to ask ye," she returned, with equal sobriety. "Jess now ye kin take your stand up thar in the loft and see what 's comin'."

He did not linger, but climbed to the place assigned him, glad to escape the company of the woman who at that moment he almost hated. In his unreflecting passion for Cressy he had always evaded the thought of this relationship or propinquity ; the mother had recalled it to him in a way that imperiled even his passion for the daughter ; his mind was wholly preoccupied with the idiotic, exasperating, and utterly hopeless position that had been forced upon him. In the bitterness of his spirit his sense of personal danger was so far absorbed that he speculated on the chance

bullet in the *mêlée* that might end his folly and relieve him of responsibility. Shut up in a barn with a furious woman, in a lawless defense of questionable rights — with the added consciousness that an equally questionable passion had drawn him into it, and that *she* knew it — death seemed to offer the only escape from the explanation he could never give. If another sting could have been added it was the absurd conviction that Cressy would not appreciate his sacrifice, but was perhaps even at that moment calmly congratulating herself on the felicitousness of the complication in which she had left him.

Suddenly he heard a shout and the trampling of horse. The sides of the loft were scantily boarded to allow the extension of the pent-up grain, and between the interstices Ford, without being himself seen, had an uninterrupted view of the plain between him and the line of willows. As he gazed, five men hurriedly issued from the extreme left and ran towards the barn. McKinstry and his followers simultaneously broke from the same covert further to the right and galloped forward to intercept them. But although mounted, the greater distance they had to traverse brought them to the rear of the building only as the Harrison party came to a sudden halt before the closed and barricaded doors of the usually defenseless barn. The discomfiture of the latter was greeted by a derisive shout from the McKinstry party — albeit, equally astonished. But in that brief moment Ford recognized in the leader of the Harrisons the well-known figure of the Sheriff of Tuolumne. It needed only this to cap the climax of the fatality that seemed to pursue him. He was no longer a lawless opposer of equally lawless forces, but he was actually resisting the law itself. He understood the situation now. It was some idiotic blunder of Uncle Ben's that had precipitated this attack.

The belligerents had already cocked their weapons, al-

though the barn was still a rampart between the parties. But an adroit flanker of McKinstry's, creeping through the tall mustard, managed to take up an enfilading position as the Harrisons advanced to break in the door. A threatening shout from the ambuscaded partisans caused them to hurriedly fall back towards the rear of the barn. There was a pause, and then began the usual Homeric chaff, — with this Western difference that it was cunningly intended to draw the other's fire.

"Why don't you blaze away at the door, you —— —— ! It won't hurt ye ! "

"He 's afraid the bolt will shoot back ! " Laughter from the McKinstrys.

" Come outer the tall grass and show yourself, you black, mud-eating gopher."

"He can't. He 's dropped his grit and is sarchin' for it." Goading laughter from the Harrisons.

Each man waited for that single shot which would precipitate the fight. Even in their lawlessness the rude instinct of the duello swayed them. The officer of the law recognized the principle as well as its practical advantage in a collision, but he hesitated to sacrifice one of his men in an attack on the barn, which would draw the fire of McKinstry at that necessarily fatal range. As a brave man he would have taken the risk himself, but as a prudent one, he reflected that his hurriedly collected posse were all partisans, and if he fell the conflict would resolve itself into a purely partisan struggle without a single unprejudiced witness to justify his conduct in the popular eye. The master also knew this ; it had checked his first impulse to come forward as a mediator ; his only reliance now was on Mrs. McKinstry's restraint and the sheriff's forbearance. The next instant both seemed to be imperiled.

" Well, why don't you wade in ? " sneered Dick McKinstry ; " who do you reckon 's hidden in the barn ? "

"I 'll tell ye," said a harsh, passionate voice from the hillside. "It 's Cressy McKinstry and the schoolmaster hidin' in the hay."

Both parties turned quickly towards the intruder who had approached them unperceived. But the speech was followed by a more startling revulsion of sentiment as Mrs. McKinstry's voice rang out from the barn, "You lie, Seth Davis!"

The brief advantage offered to the sheriff in Davis's advent as a neutral witness was utterly lost by this unlooked-for revelation of Mrs. McKinstry's presence in the barn! The fates were clearly against him! A woman in the fight, and an old one at that! A white woman to be forcibly ejected! In the whole unwritten code of Southwestern chivalry there was no such precedent.

"Stand back," he said disgustedly to his followers, "stand back and let the d—d barn slide. But you, Hiram McKinstry, I 'll give *you* five minutes to shake yourself clear of your wife's petticoats and git!" His blood was up now — the quicker from his momentary weakness and the trick of which he thought himself a dupe.

Again the fatal signal seemed imminent, again it was delayed. For Hiram McKinstry, with clanking spurs and rifle in hand, stepped from behind the barn, full in the presence of his antagonists.

"Ez to my gitten in five minits," he began in his laziest, drowsiest manner, "we 'll see when the time 's up. But jest now words hev passed betwixt my wife and Seth Davis. Afore anythin' else goes on yer, he 's got to take *his* back. My wife allows he lies; I allow he lies too, and I stan' here to say it."

The right of personal insult to precedence of redress was too old a frontier principle to be gainsaid now. Both parties held back and every eye was turned to where Seth Davis had been standing. But he had disappeared.

Where ?

When Mrs. McKinstry hurled her denial from the barn he had taken advantage of the greater surprise to leap to one of the trusses of hay that projected beyond the loft, and secure a footing from which he quickly scrambled through the open scantling to the interior. The master who, startled by his voice, had made his way through the loose grain to the rear, reached it as Seth half crawled, half tumbled through. Their eyes met in a single flash of rage, but before Seth could utter an outcry the master had dropped his gun, seized him around the neck and crammed a thick handful of the soft hay he had hurriedly snatched up into his face and gasping mouth. A furious but silent struggle ensued; the yielding hay on which they both fell deadened all sound of a scuffle and concealed them from view; masses of it, already loosened by the intruder's entrance, and dislodged in their contortions, began to slip through the opening to the ground. The master, still uppermost and holding Seth firmly down, allowed himself to slip with them, shoving his adversary before him; the maddened Missourian detecting his purpose made a desperate attempt to change his position, and succeeded in raising his knee against the master's chest. Ford, guarding against what seemed to be only a wrestler's strategy, contented himself by locking the bent knee firmly in that position, and thus unwittingly gave Seth the looked-for opportunity of drawing the bowie-knife concealed in his boot-leg. He knew his mistake only as Seth freed his arm, and threw it upward for the blow. He heard the steel slither like a scythe through the hay, and unlocking his hold desperately threw himself on the uplifted arm. The movement saved him. For the released body of Seth slipped rapidly through the opening, upheld for a single instant on the verge by the grasp of the master's two hands on the arm that still held the knife, and then dropped

heavily downward. Even then, the hay that had slipped before him would have broken his fall, but his head came in violent contact with some farming implements standing against the wall, and without a cry he was stretched senseless on the ground. The whole occurrence passed so rapidly and so noiselessly that not only did McKinstry's challenge fall upon his already unconscious ears, but the loosened hay, which in the master's struggles to recover himself still continued to slide gently from the loft, actually hid him from the eyes of the spectators who sought him a moment afterwards. A mass of hay and wild oats, dislodged apparently by Mrs. McKinstry in securing her defenses, was all that met their eyes; even the woman herself was unconscious of the deadly struggle that had taken place above her.

The master staggered to an upright position half choked and half blinded with dust, turgid and bursting with the rush of blood to his head, but clear and collected in mind, and unremorsefully triumphant. Unconscious of the real extent of Seth's catastrophe he groped for and seized his gun, examined the cap, and eagerly waited for a renewed attack. "He tried to kill me; he would have killed me; if he comes again I must kill him," he kept repeating to himself. It never occurred to him that this was inconsistent with his previous thought — indeed with the whole tenor of his belief. Perhaps the most peaceful man who has been once put in peril of life by an adversary, who has recognized death threatening him in the eye of his antagonist, is by some strange paradox not likely to hold his own life or the life of his adversary as dearly as before. Everything was silent now. The suspense irritated him; he no longer dreaded but even longed for the shot that would precipitate hostilities. What were they doing? Guided by Seth, were they concerting a fresh attack?

Listening more intently he became aware of a distant

shouting, and even more distinctly of the dull, heavy trampling of hoofs. A sudden angry fear that the McKinstrys had been beaten off and were flying — a fear and anger that now for the first time identified him with their cause — came over him, and he scrambled quickly towards the opening below. But the sound was approaching and with it came a voice.

"Hold on there, sheriff!"

It was the voice of the agent Stacey.

There was a pause of reluctant murmuring. But the warning was enforced by a command from another voice — weak, unheroic, but familiar, "I order this yer to stop — right yer!"

A burst of ironical laughter followed. The voice was Uncle Ben's.

"Stand back! This is no time for foolin'," said the sheriff roughly.

"He 's right, Sheriff Briggs," said Stacey's voice hurriedly; "you 're acting for *him;* he 's the owner of the land."

"What? That Ben Dabney?"

"Yes; he 's Daubigny, who bought the title from us."

There was a momentary hush, and then a hurried murmur.

"Which means, gents," rose Uncle Ben's voice persuasively, "that this yer young man, though fair-minded and well-intended, hez bin a leetle too chipper and previous in orderin' out the law. This yer ain't no law matter with *me*, boys. It ain't to be settled by law-papers, no shot-guns and deringers. It 's suthin' to be chawed over sociable-like, between drinks. Ef any harm hez bin done ef anythin' 's happened, I 'm yer to 'demnify the sheriff, and make it comf'ble all round. Yer know me, boys. I 'm talkin'. It 's me — Dabney, or Daubigny, which ever way you like it."

But in the silence that followed the passions had not yet evidently cooled. It was broken by the sarcastic drawl of Dick McKinstry, "If them Harrisons don't mind heven had their medders trampled over by a few white men, why" —

"The sheriff ez 'demnified for that," interrupted Uncle Ben hastily.

"'N' ef Dick McKinstry don't mind the damage to his pants in crawlin' out o' gun-shot in the tall grass" — retorted Joe Harrison.

"I'm yer to settle that, boys," said Uncle Ben cheerfully.

"But who'll settle *this?*" clamored the voice of the older Harrison from behind the barn where he had stumbled in crossing the fallen hay. "Yer's Seth Davis lyin' in the hay with the top of his head busted. Who's to pay for that?"

There was a rush to the spot, and a quick cry of reaction.

"Whose work is this?" demanded the sheriff's voice, with official severity.

The master uttered an instinctive exclamation of defiance, and dropping quickly to the barn floor would the next moment have opened the door and declared himself, but Mrs. McKinstry, after a single glance at his determined face, suddenly threw herself before him with an imperious gesture of silence. Then her voice rang clearly from the barn: —

"Well, if it's the hound that tried to force his way in yer, I reckon ye kin put that down to ME!"

CHAPTER X

It was known to Indian Spring, the next day, amid great excitement, that a serious fracas had been prevented on the ill-fated boundary by the dramatic appearance of Uncle Ben Dabney, not only as a peacemaker, but as Mr. Daubigny the *bona fide* purchaser and owner of the land. It was known and accepted with great hilarity that "old Ma'am McKinstry" had defended the barn alone and unaided, with — as variously stated — a pitchfork, an old stable-broom, and a pail of dirty water, against Harrison, his party, and the entire able posse of the Sheriff of Tuolumne County, with no further damage than a scalp wound which the head of Seth Davis received while falling from the loft of the barn from which he had been dislodged by Mrs. McKinstry and the broom aforesaid. It was known with unanimous approbation that the acquisition of the land-title by a hitherto humble citizen of Indian Spring was a triumph of the settlement over foreign interference. But it was not known that the schoolmaster was a participant in the fight, or even present on the spot. At Mrs. McKinstry's suggestion he had remained concealed in the loft until after the withdrawal of both parties and the still unconscious Seth. When Ford had remonstrated, with the remark that Seth would be sure to declare the truth when he recovered his senses, Mrs. McKinstry smiled grimly: "I reckon when he comes to know *I* was with ye all the time, he 'd rather hev it allowed that I licked him than *you*. I don't say he 'll let it pass ez far ez you 're concerned or won't try to get even with ye, but he won't go round tellin' *why*. However," she added

still more grimly, "if you think you're ekul to tellin' the hull story — how ye kem to be yer and that Seth was n't lyin' arter all when he blurted it out afore 'em — why I sha'n't hinder ye." The master said no more. And indeed for a day or two nothing transpired to show that Seth was not equally reticent.

Nevertheless Mr. Ford was far from being satisfied with the issue of his adventure. His relations with Cressy were known to the mother, and although she had not again alluded to them, she would probably inform her husband. Yet he could not help noticing, with a mingling of unreasoning relief and equally unreasoning distrust, that she exhibited a scornful unconcern in the matter, apart from the singular use to which she had put it. He could hardly count upon McKinstry, with his heavy, blind devotion to Cressy, being as indifferent. On the contrary, he had acquired the impression, without caring to examine it closely, that her father would not be displeased at his marrying Cressy, for it would really amount to that. But here again he was forced to contemplate what he had always avoided, the possible meaning and result of their intimacy. In the reckless, thoughtless, extravagant — yet thus far innocent — indulgence of their mutual passion, he had never spoken of marriage, nor — and it struck him now with the same incongruous mingling of relief and uneasiness — had *she!* Perhaps this might have arisen from some superstitious or sensitive recollection on her part of her previous engagement to Seth, but he remembered now that they had not even exchanged the usual vows of eternal constancy. It may seem strange that, in the half-dozen stolen and rapturous interviews which had taken place between these young lovers, there had been no suggestion of the future, nor any of those glowing projects for a united destiny peculiar to their years and inexperience. They had lived entirely in a blissful present, with no plans beyond their next rendezvous.

In that mysterious and sudden absorption of each other, not only the past, but the future seemed to have been forgotten.

These thoughts were passing through his mind the next afternoon to the prejudice of that calm and studious repose which the deserted schoolhouse usually superinduced, and which had been so fondly noted by McKinstry and Uncle Ben. The latter had not arrived for his usual lesson; it was possible that undue attention had been attracted to his movements now that his good fortune was known; and the master was alone save for the occasional swooping incursion of a depredatory jay in search of crumbs from the children's luncheons, who added apparently querulous insult to the larcenous act. He regretted Uncle Ben's absence, as he wanted to know more about his connection with the Harrison attack and his eventual intentions. Ever since the master emerged from the barn and regained his hotel under cover of the darkness, he had heard only the vaguest rumors, and he purposely avoided direct inquiry.

He had been quite prepared for Cressy's absence from school that morning — indeed in his present vacillating mood he had felt that her presence would have been irksome and embarrassing; but it struck him suddenly and unpleasantly that her easy desertion of him at that critical moment in the barn had not since been followed by the least sign of anxiety to know the result of her mother's interference. What did she imagine had transpired between Mrs. McKinstry and himself? Had she confidently expected her mother's prompt acceptance of the situation and a reconcilation? Was that the reason why she had treated that interruption as lightly as if she were already his recognized betrothed? Had she even calculated upon it? had she — He stopped, his cheek glowing from irritation under the suspicion, and shame at the disloyalty of entertaining it.

Opening his desk, he began to arrange his papers mechanically, when he discovered, with a slight feeling of

annoyance, that he had placed Cressy's bouquet — now dried and withered — in the same pigeonhole with the mysterious letters with which he had so often communed in former days. He at once separated them with a half bitter smile, yet after a moment's hesitation, and with his old sense of attempting to revive a forgotten association, he tried to re-peruse them. But they did not even restrain his straying thoughts, nor prevent him from detecting a singular occurrence. The nearly level sun was, after its old fashion, already hanging the shadowed tassels of the pine boughs like a garland on the wall. But the shadow seemed to have suddenly grown larger and more compact, and he turned, with a quick consciousness of some interposing figure at the pane. Nothing however was to be seen. Yet so impressed had he been that he walked to the door and stepped from the porch to discover the intruder. The clearing was deserted, there was a slight rustling in the adjacent laurels, but no human being was visible. Nevertheless the old feeling of security and isolation, which had never been quite the same since Mr. McKinstry's confession, seemed now to have fled the sylvan schoolhouse altogether, and he somewhat angrily closed his desk, locked it, and determined to go home.

His way lay through the first belt of pines towards the mining-flat, but to-day from some vague impulse he turned and followed the ridge. He had not proceeded far when he perceived Rupert Filgee lounging before him on the trail, and at a little distance further on his brother Johnny. At the sight of these two favorite pupils Mr. Ford's heart smote him with a consciousness that he had of late neglected them, possibly because Rupert's lofty scorn of the "silly" sex was not as amusing to him as formerly, and possibly because Johnny's curiosity had been at times obtrusive. He however quickened his pace and joined Rupert, laying his hand familiarly as of old on his shoulder. To his surprise the

boy received his advances with some constraint and awkwardness, glancing uneasily in the direction of Johnny. A sudden idea crossed Mr. Ford's mind.

"Were you looking for me at the schoolroom just now?"

"No, sir."

"You did n't look in at the window to see if I was there?" continued the master.

"No, sir."

The master glanced at Rupert. Truth-telling was a part of Rupert's truculent temper, although, as the boy had often bitterly remarked, it had always "told agin him."

"All right," said the master, perfect convinced. "It must have been my fancy; but I thought somebody looked in — or passed by the window."

But here Johnny, who had overheard the dialogue and approached them, suddenly threw himself upon his brother's unoffending legs and commenced to beat and pull them about with unintelligible protests. Rupert, without looking down, said quietly, "Quit that now — I won't, I tell ye," and went through certain automatic movements of dislodging Johnny as if he were a mere impeding puppy.

"What 's the matter, Johnny?" said the master, to whom these gyrations were not unfamiliar.

Johnny only replied by a new grip of his brother's trousers.

"Well, sir," said Rupert, slightly recovering his dimples and his readiness, "Johnny, yer, wants me to tell ye something. Ef he was n't the most original self-cocking, God-forsaken liar in Injin Spring — ef he did n't lie awake in his crib mornin's to invent lies fer the day, I would n't mind tellin' ye, and would hev told you before. However, since you ask, and since you think you saw somebody around the schoolhouse, Johnny yer allows that Seth Davis is spyin' round and followin' ye wherever you go, and he

dragged me down yer to see it. He says he saw him doggin' ye."

"With a knife and pithtolth," added Johnny's boundless imagination, to the detriment of his limited facts.

Mr. Ford looked keenly from the one to the other, but rather with a suspicion that they were cognizant of his late fracas than belief in the truth of Johnny's statement.

"And what do *you* think of it, Rupert?" he asked carelessly.

"I think, sir," said Rupert, "that allowin' — for onct — that Johnny ain't lying, mebbee it 's Cressy McKinstry that Seth 's huntin' round, and knowin' that she 's always runnin' after you" — he stopped, and reddening with a newborn sense that his fatal truthfulness had led him into a glaring indelicacy towards the master, hurriedly added, "I mean, sir, that mebbee it 's Uncle Ben he 's jealous of, now that he 's got rich enough for Cressy to hev him, and knowin' he comes to school in the afternoon perhaps" —

"'T ain't either!" broke in Johnny promptly. "Theth 's over ther beyond the thchool, and Crethy 's eatin' ithecream at the bakerth with Uncle Ben."

"Well, suppose she is, Seth don't know it, silly!" answered Rupert sharply. Then more politely to the master: "That 's it! Seth has seen Uncle Ben gallivanting with Cressy and thinks he 's bringing her over yer. Don't you see?"

The master however did not see but one thing. The girl who had only two days ago carelessly left it to him to explain a compromising situation to her mother — this girl, who had precipitated him into a frontier fight to the peril of his position and her good name, was calmly eating ices with an available suitor without the least concern of the past! The connection was perhaps illogical, but it was unpleasant. It was the more awkward from the fact that he fancied that not only Rupert's beautiful eyes, but even

the infant Johnny's round ones, were fixed upon him with an embarrassed expression of hesitating and foreboding sympathy.

"I think Johnny believes what he says — don't you, Johnny?" he smiled, with an assumption of cheerful ease, "but I see no necessity just yet for binding Seth Davis over to keep the peace. Tell me about yourself, Rupe. I hope Uncle Ben does n't think of changing his young tutor with his good fortune?"

"No, sir," returned Rupert brightening; "he promises to take me to Sacramento with him as his private secretary or confidential clerk, you know, ef — ef" — he hesitated again with very un-Rupert-like caution, — "ef things go as he wants 'em." He stopped awkwardly and his brown eyes became clouded. "Like ez not, Mr. Ford, he 's only foolin' me — and — *himself*." The boy's eyes sought the master's curiously.

"I don't know about that," returned Mr. Ford uneasily, with a certain recollection of Uncle Ben's triumph over his own incredulity; "he surely has n't shown himself a fool or a boaster so far. I consider your prospect a very fair one, and I wish you joy of it, my boy." He ran his fingers through Rupert's curls in his old caressing fashion, the more tenderly perhaps that he fancied he still saw symptoms of stormy and wet weather in the boy's brown eyes. "Run along home, both of you, and don't worry yourselves about me."

He turned away, but had scarcely proceeded half a dozen yards before he felt a tug at his coat. Looking down he saw the diminutive Johnny. "They 'll be comin' home thith way," he said, reaching up in a hoarse confidential whisper.

"Who?"

"Crethy and 'im."

But before the master could make any response to this presumably gratifying information Johnny had rejoined his

brother. The two boys waved their hands towards him with the same diffident and mysterious sympathy that left him hesitating between a smile and a frown. Then he proceeded on his way. Nevertheless, for no other reason than that he felt a sudden distaste to meeting any one, when he reached the point where the trail descended directly to the settlement he turned into a longer and more solitary détour by the woods.

The sun was already so low that its long rays pierced the forest from beneath, and suffused the dim colonnade of straight pine shafts with a golden haze, while it left the dense intercrossed branches fifty feet above in deeper shadow. Walking in this yellow twilight, with his feet noiselessly treading down the yielding carpet of pine-needles, it seemed to the master that he was passing through the woods in a dream. There was no sound but the dull intermittent double-knock of the woodpecker, or the drowsy croak of some early roosting bird; all suggestion of the settlement with all traces of human contiguity were left far behind. It was therefore with a strange and nervous sense of being softly hailed by some woodland sprite that he seemed to hear his own name faintly wafted upon the air. He turned quickly; it was Cressy, panting behind him! Even then, in her white closely gathered skirts, her bared head and graceful arching neck bent forward, her flying braids freed from the straw hat which she had swung from her arm so as not to impede her flight, there was so much of the following Mænad about her that he was for an instant startled.

He stopped; she bounded to him, and throwing her arms around his neck with a light laugh, let herself hang for a moment breathless on his breast. Then recovering her speech she said slowly: —

"I started on an Injin trot after you, just as you turned off the trail, but you 'd got so far ahead while I was shaking myself clear of Uncle Ben that I had to jist lope the

whole way through the woods to catch up." She stopped, and looking up into his troubled face caught his cheeks between her hands, and bringing his knit brows down to the level of her humid blue eyes said, "You have n't kissed me yet. What 's the matter ? "

"Does n't it strike you that *I* might ask that question, considering that it 's three days since I 've seen you, and that you left me, in a rather awkward position, to explain matters to your mother ? " he said coldly. He had formulated the sentence in his mind some moments before, but now that it was uttered, it appeared singularly weak and impotent.

"That 's so," she said, with a frank laugh, burying her face in his waistcoat. "You see, dandy boy," — his pet name, — "I reckoned for that reason we 'd better lie low for a day or two. Well," she continued, untying his cravat and retying it again, "how *did* you crawl out of it ? "

"Do you mean to say your mother did not tell you ? " he asked indignantly.

"Why should she ? " returned Cressy lazily. "She never talks to me of these things, honey."

"And you knew nothing about it ? "

Cressy shook her head, and then winding one of her long braids around the young man's neck, offered the end of it to his mouth, and on his sternly declining it, took it in her own.

Yet even her ignorance of what had really happened did not account to the master for the indifference of her long silence, and albeit conscious of some inefficiency in his present unheroic attitude, he continued sarcastically, "May I ask *what* you imagined would happen when you left me ? "

"Well," said Cressy confidently, "I reckoned, chile, you could lie as well as the next man, and that, being gifted, you 'd sling maw something new and purty. Why,

I ain't got no fancy, but I fixed up something against paw's questioning *me*. I made that conceited Masters promise to swear that *he* was in the barn with me. Then I calculated to tell paw that you came meandering along just before maw popped in, and that I skedaddled to join Masters. Of course," she added quickly, tightening her hold of the master as he made a sudden attempt at withdrawal, "I did n't let on to Masters *why* I wanted him to promise, or that you were there."

"Cressy," said Ford, irritated beyond measure, "are you mad, or do you think I am?"

The girl's face changed. She cast a half-frightened, half-questioning glance at his eyes, and then around the darkening aisle. "If we 're going to quarrel, Jack," she said hurriedly, "don't let 's do it *before folks*."

"In the name of Heaven," he said, following her eyes indignantly, "what do you mean?"

"I mean," she said, with a slight shiver of resignation and scorn, "if you — oh dear! if *it 's all* going to be like *them*, let 's keep it to ourselves."

He gazed at her in hopeless bewilderment. Did she really mean that she was more frightened at the possible revelation of their disagreement than of their intimacy?

"Come," she continued tenderly, still glancing, however, uneasily around her, "come! We 'll be more comfortable in the hollow. It 's only a step." Still holding him by her braid she half led, half dragged him away. To the right was one of those sudden depressions in the ground caused by the subsidence of the earth from hidden springs and the uprooting of one or two of the larger trees. When she had forced him down this declivity below the level of the needle-strewn forest floor, she seated him upon a mossy root, and shaking out her skirts in a half-childlike, half-coquettish way, comfortably seated herself in his lap, with her arm supplementing the clinging braid around his neck.

"Now hark to me, and don't holler so loud," she said, turning his face to her questioning eyes. "What's gone of you anyway, nigger boy?" It should be premised that Cressy's terms of endearment were mainly negro-dialectical, reminiscences of her brief babyhood, her slave-nurse, and the only playmates she had ever known.

Still implacable, the master coldly repeated the counts of his indictment against the girl's strange indifference and still stranger entanglements, winding up by setting forth the whole story of his interview with her mother, his forced defense of the barn, Seth's outspoken accusation, and their silent and furious struggle in the loft. But if he had expected that this daughter of a Southwestern fighter would betray any enthusiasm over her lover's participation in one of their characteristic feuds, if he looked for any fond praise for his own prowess, he was bitterly mistaken. She loosened her arm from his neck of her own accord, unwound the braid, and putting her two little hands clasped between her knees, crossed her small feet before her, and, albeit still in his lap, looked the picture of languid dejection.

"Maw ought to have more sense, and you ought to have lit out of the window after me," she said, with a lazy sigh. "Fightin' ain't in your line — it 's too much like *them*. That Seth 's sure to get even with you."

"I can protect myself," he said haughtily. Nevertheless he had a depressing consciousness that his lithe and graceful burden was somewhat in the way of any heroic expression.

"Seth can lick you out of your boots, chile," she said, with naïve abstraction. Then, as he struggled to secure an upright position, "Don't git riled, honey. Of course *you 'd* let them kill you before you 'd give in. But that 's their best holt — that 's their trade! That 's all they can do — don't you see? That 's where *you 're* not like *them* — that 's why you 're not their low-down kind! That 's why you 're my boy — that 's why I love you!"

She had thrown her whole weight again upon his shoulders until she had forced him back to his seat. Then, with her locked hands again around his neck, she looked intently into his face. The varying color dropped from her cheeks, her eyes seemed to grow larger, the same look of rapt absorption and possession that had so transfigured her young face at the ball was fixed upon it now. Her lips parted slightly, she seemed to murmur rather than speak: —

"What are these people to us? What are Seth's jealousies, Uncle Ben's and Masters's foolishness, paw and maw's quarr'ls and tantrums to you and me, dear? What is it what *they* think, what they reckon, what they plan out, and what they set themselves against — to us? We love each other, we belong to each other, without their help or their hindrance. From the time we first saw each other it was so, and from that time paw and maw, and Seth and Masters, and even *you* and *me*, dear, had nothing else to do. That was love as I know it; not Seth's sneaking rages, and Uncle Ben's sneaking fooleries, and Masters's sneaking conceit, but only love. And knowing that, I let Seth rage, and Uncle Ben dawdle, and Masters trifle — and for what? To keep them from me and my boy. They were satisfied, and we were happy."

Vague and unreasoning as he knew her speech to be, the rapt and perfect conviction with which it was uttered staggered him.

"But how is this to end, Cressy?" he said passionately.

The abstracted look passed, and the slight color and delicate mobility of her face returned. "To end, dandy boy?" she repeated lazily. "You didn't think of marrying me — did you?"

He blushed, stammered, and said "Yes," albeit with all his past vacillation and his present distrust of her transparent on his cheek and audible in his voice.

"No, dear," she said quietly, reaching down, untying

her little shoe and shaking the dust and pine-needles from its recesses, "no! I don't know enough to be a wife to you, just now, and you know it. And I could n't keep a house fit for you, and you could n't afford to keep *me* without it. And then it would be all known, and it would n't be us two, dear, and our lonely meetings any more. And we could n't be engaged — that would be too much like me and Seth over again. That 's what you mean, dandy boy — for you 're only a dandy boy, you know, and they don't get married to backwood Southern girls who have n't a nigger to bless themselves with since the war! No," she continued, lifting her proud little head so promptly after Ford had recovered from his surprise as to make the ruse of emptying her shoe perfectly palpable, "no, that 's what we 've both allowed, dear, all along. And now, honey, it 's near time for me to go. Tell me something good — before I go. Tell me that you love me as you used to — tell me how you felt that night at the ball when you first knew we loved each other. But stop — kiss me first — there, once more — for keeps."

CHAPTER XI

When Uncle Ben, or "Benjamin Daubigny, Esq.," as he was already known in the columns of the "Star," accompanied Miss Cressy McKinstry on her way home after the first display of attention and hospitality since his accession to wealth and position, he remained for some moments in a state of bewildered and smiling idiocy. It was true that their meeting was chance and accidental; it was true that Cressy had accepted his attention with lazy amusement; it was true that she had suddenly and audaciously left him on the borders of the McKinstry woods in a way that might have seemed rude and abrupt to any escort less invincibly good humored than Uncle Ben, but none of these things marred his fatuous felicity. It is even probable that in his gratuitous belief that his timid attentions had been too marked and impulsive, he attributed Cressy's flight to a maidenly coyness that pleasurably increased his admiration for her and his confidence in himself. In his abstraction of enjoyment and in the gathering darkness he ran against a fir-tree very much as he had done while walking with her, and he confusedly apologized to it as he had to her, and by her own appellation. In this way he eventually overran his trail and found himself unexpectedly and apologetically in the clearing before the schoolhouse.

"Ef this ain't the singlerest thing, miss," he said, and then stopped suddenly. A faint noise in the schoolhouse like the sound of splintered wood attracted his attention. The master was evidently there. If he was alone he would speak to him.

He went to the window, looked in, and in an instant his amiable abstraction left him. He crept softly to the door, tried it, and then putting his powerful shoulder against the panel, forced the lock from its fastenings. He entered the room as Seth Davis, frightened but furious, lifted himself from before the master's desk which he had just broken open. He had barely time to conceal something in his pocket and close the lid again before Uncle Ben approached him.

"What mout ye be doin' here, Seth Davis?" he asked, with the slow deliberation which in that locality meant mischief.

"And what mout *you* be doin' here, Mister Ben Dabney?" said Seth, resuming his effrontery.

"Well," returned Uncle Ben, planting himself in the aisle before his opponent, "I ain't doin' no sheriff's posse business jest now, but I reckon to keep my hand in far enuff to purtect other folks' property," he added, with a significant glance at the broken lock of the desk.

"Ben Dabney," said Seth in snarling expostulation, "I hain't got no quar'l with ye!"

"Then hand me over whatever you took just now from teacher's desk and we 'll talk about that afterwards," said Uncle Ben, advancing.

"I tell ye I hain't got no quar'l with ye, Uncle Ben," continued Seth, retreating with a malignant sneer; "and when you talk of protectin' other folks' property, mebbee ye 'd better protect *your own* — or what ye 'd like to call so — instead of quar'lin' with the man that 's helpin' ye. I 've got yer the proofs that that sneakin' hound of a Yankee schoolmaster that Cress McKinstry 's hell bent on, and that the old man and old woman are just chuckin' into her arms, is a lyin', black-hearted, hypocritical seducer" —

"Stop!" said Uncle Ben in a voice that made the crazy casement rattle.

He strode towards Seth Davis, no longer with his habitual careful, hesitating step, but with a tread that seemed to shake the whole schoolroom. A single dominant clutch of his powerful right hand on the young man's breast forced him backwards into the vacant chair of the master. His usually florid face had grown as gray as the twilight; his menacing form in a moment filled the little room and darkened the windows. Then in some inexplicable reaction his figure slightly drooped, he laid one heavy hand tremblingly on the desk, and with the other affected to wipe his mouth after his old embarrassed fashion.

"What's that you were sayin' o' Cressy?" he said huskily.

"Wot everybody says," said the frightened Seth, gaining a cowardly confidence under his adversary's emotion. "Wot every cub that sets yer under his cantin' teachin', and sees 'em together, knows. It 's wot you 'd hev knowed ef he and Rupe Filgee had n't played ye fer a softy all the time. And while you 've bin hangin' round yer fer a flicker of Cressy's gownd as she prances out o' school, he 's bin lyin' low and laffin' at ye, and while he 's turned Rupe over to keep you here, pretendin' to give ye lessons, he 's bin gallivantin' round with her and huggin' and kissin' her in barns and in the brush — and now *you* want to quar'l with me."

He stopped, panting for breath, and stared malignantly in the gray face of his hearer. But Uncle Ben only lifted his heavy hand mildly with an awkward gesture of warning, stepped softly in his old cautious hesitating manner to the open door, closed it, and returned gently: —

"I reckon ye got in through the winder, did n't ye, Seth?" he said, with a labored affectation of unemotional ease, "a kind o' one leg over, and one, two, and then you 're in, eh?"

"Never you mind *how* I got in, Ben Dabney," returned

Seth, his hostility and insolence increasing with his opponent's evident weakness, "ez long ez I got yer and got, by G—d! what I kem here fer! For whiles all this was goin' on, and whiles the old fool man and old fool woman was swallowin' what they did see and blinkin', at what they did n't, and huggin' themselves that they 'd got high-toned kempany fer their darter, that high-toned kempany was playin' *them* too, by G—d! Yes, sir! that high-toned, cantin' school-teacher was keepin' a married woman in 'Frisco all the while he was here honey-foglin' with Cressy, and I 've got the papers yer to prove it." He tapped his breast pocket with a coarse laugh, and thrust his face forward into the gray shadow of his adversary's.

"An' you sorter spotted their bein' in this yer desk and bursted it?" said Uncle Ben, gravely examining the broken lock in the darkness as if it were the most important feature of the incident.

Seth nodded. "You bet your life. I saw him through the winder only this afternoon lookin' over 'em alone, and I reckoned to lay my hands on 'em if I had to bust him or his desk. And I did!" he added, with a triumphant chuckle.

"And you did — sure pop!" said Uncle Ben, with slow deliberate admiration, passing his heavy hand along the splintered lid. "And you reckon, Seth, that this yer showin' of him up will break off enythin' betwixt him and this yer — this yer Miss — Miss McKinstry?" he continued, with labored formality.

"I reckon ef the old fool McKinstry don't shoot him in his tracks thar 'll be white men enough in Injin Springs to ride this high-toned, pizenous hypocrite on a rail outer the settlement!"

"That 's so!" said Uncle Ben musingly, after a thoughtful pause, in which he still seemed to be more occupied with the broken desk than his companion's remark. Then

he went on cautiously, "And ez this thing orter be worked mighty fine, Seth, p'r'aps, on the hull, you 'd better let me have them papers."

"What! *You?*" snarled Seth, drawing back with a glance of angry suspicion; "not if I know it!"

"Seth," said Uncle Ben, resting his elbows on the desk confidentially, and speaking with painful and heavy deliberation, "when you first interdoosed this yer subject you elluded to my hevin', so to speak, rights o' preëmption and interference with this young lady, and that, in your opinion, I was n't purtectin' them rights. It 'pears to me that, allowin' that to be gospel truth, them ther papers orter be in *my* possession — you hevin' so to speak no rights to purtect, bein' off the board with this yer young lady, and bein' moved gin'rally by free and independent cussedness. And ez I sed afore, this sort o' thing havin' to be worked mighty fine, and them papers manniperlated with judgment, I reckon, Seth, if you don't objeck, I 'll hev — hev —to trouble you."

Seth started to his feet with a rapid glance at the door, but Uncle Ben had risen again with the same alarming expression of completely filling the darkened schoolroom, and of shaking the floor beneath him at the slightest movement. Already he fancied he saw Uncle Ben's powerful arm hovering above him ready to descend. It suddenly occurred to him that if he left the execution of his scheme of exposure and vengeance to Uncle Ben, the onus of stealing the letters would fall equally upon their possessor. This advantage seemed more probable than the danger of Uncle Ben's weakly yielding them up to the master. In the latter case he, Seth, could still circulate the report of having seen the letters which Uncle Ben had himself stolen in a fit of jealousy — a hypothesis the more readily accepted from the latter's familiar knowledge of the schoolhouse and his presumed ambitious jealousy of Cressy in his present attitude

as a man of position. With affected reluctance and hesitation he put his hand to his breast pocket.

"Of course," he said, "if you 're kalkilatin' to take up the quar'l on *your* rights, and ez Cressy ain't anythin' more to me, *you* orter hev the proofs. Only don't trust them into that hound's hands. Once he gets 'em again he 'll secure a warrant agin you for stealin'. That 'll be his game. I 'd show 'em to *her* first — don't ye see ? — and I reckon ef she 's old Ma'am McKinstry's darter, she 'll make it lively for him."

He handed the letters to the looming figure before him. It seemed to become again a yielding mortal, and said in a hesitating voice, "P'r'aps you 'd better make tracks outer this, Seth, and leave me yer to put things to rights and fix up that door and the desk agin to-morrow mornin'. He 'd better not know it to onc't, and so start a row about bein' broken into."

The proposition seemed to please Seth ; he even extended his hand in the darkness. But he met only an irresponsive void. With a slight shrug of his shoulders and a grunting farewell, he felt his way to the door and disappeared. For a few moments it seemed as if Uncle Ben had also deserted the schoolhouse, so profound and quiet was the hush that fell upon it. But as the eye became accustomed to the shadow a grayish bulk appeared to grow out of it over the master's desk and shaped itself into the broad figure of Uncle Ben. Later, when the moon rose and looked in at the window, it saw him as the master had seen him on the first day he had begun his lessons in the schoolhouse, with his face bent forward over the desk and the same look of childlike perplexity and struggle that he had worn at his allotted task. Unheroic, ridiculous, and no doubt blundering and idiotic as then, but still vaguely persistent in his thought, he remained for some moments in this attitude. Then rising and taking advantage of the moonlight that

flooded the desk, he set himself to mend the broken lock with a large mechanical clasp-knife he produced from his pocket, and the aid of his workmanlike thumb and finger. Presently he began to whistle softly, at first a little artificially and with relapses of reflective silence. The lock of the desk restored, he secured into position again that part of the door-lock which he had burst off in his entrance. This done, he closed the door gently and once more stepped out into the moonlit clearing. In replacing his knife in his pocket he took out the letters which he had not touched since they were handed to him in the darkness. His first glance at the handwriting caused him to stop. Then still staring at it, he began to move slowly and automatically backwards to the porch. When he reached it he sat down, unfolded a letter, and without attempting to read it, turned its pages over and over with the unfamiliarity of an illiterate man in search of the signature. This when found apparently plunged him again into motionless abstraction. Only once he changed his position to pull up the legs of his trousers, open his knees, and extend the distance between his feet, and then with the unfolded pages carefully laid in the moonlit space thus opened before him, regarded them with dubious speculation. At the end of ten minutes he rose with a sigh of physical and mental relaxation, refolded the letter, put it in his pocket, and made his way to the town.

When he reached the hotel he turned into the bar-room, and observing that it happened to be comparatively deserted, asked for a glass of whiskey. In response to the bar-keeper's glance of curiosity — as Uncle Ben seldom drank, and then only as a social function with others — he explained : —

"I reckon straight whiskey is about ez good ez the next thing for blind chills."

The bar-keeper here interposed that in his larger medical experience he had found the exhibition of ginger in combination with gin attended with effect, although it was evident

that in his business capacity he regarded Uncle Ben, as a drinker, with distrust.

"Ye ain't seen Mr. Ford hanging round yer lately?" continued Uncle Ben, with laborious ease.

The bar-keeper, with his eye still scornfully fixed on his customer, but his hands which were engaged in washing his glasses under the counter giving him the air of humorously communicating with a hidden confederate, had not seen the schoolmaster that afternoon.

Uncle Ben turned away and slowly mounted the staircase to the master's room. After a moment's pause on the landing, which must have been painfully obvious to any one who heard his heavy ascent, he gave two timid raps on the door which were equally ridiculous in contrast with his powerful tread. The door was opened promptly by the master.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said shortly. "Come in."

Uncle Ben entered without noticing the somewhat ungracious form of invitation. "It war me," he said, "dropped in, not finding ye downstairs. Let's have a drink."

The master gazed at Uncle Ben, who, owing to his abstraction, had not yet wiped his mouth of the liquor he had imperfectly swallowed, and was in consequence more redolent of whiskey than a confirmed toper. He rang the bell for the desired refreshment with a slightly cynical smile. He was satisfied that his visitor, like many others of humble position, was succumbing to his good fortune.

"I wanted to see ye, Mr. Ford," he began, taking an unproffered chair and depositing his hat after some hesitation outside the door, "in regard to what I onc't told ye about my wife in Mizzouri. P'r'aps you disremember?"

"I remember," returned the master resignedly.

"You know it was that arternoon that fool Stacey sent the sheriff and the Harrisons over to McKinstry's barn."

"Go on!" petulantly said the master, who had his own reasons for not caring to recall it.

"It was that arternoon, you know, that you had n't time to hark to me — hevin' to go off on an engagement," continued Uncle Ben, with protracted deliberation, "and" —

"Yes, yes, I remember," interrupted the master exasperatedly, "and really unless you get on faster, I 'll have to leave you again."

"It was that arternoon," said Uncle Ben, without heeding him, "when I told you I had n't any idea what had become o' my wife ez I left in Mizzouri."

"Yes," said the master sharply, "and I told you it was your bounden duty to look for her."

"That 's so," said Uncle Ben, nodding comfortably, "them 's your very words; on'y a leetle more strong than that, ef I don't disremember. Well, I reckon I 've got an idee!" The master assumed a sudden expression of interest, but Uncle Ben did not vary his monotonous tone.

"I kem across that idee, so to speak, on the trail. I kem across it in some letters ez was lying wide open in the brush. I picked 'em up and I 've got 'em here."

He slowly took the letters from his pocket with one hand, while he dragged the chair on which he was sitting beside the master. But with a quick flush of indignation Mr. Ford rose and extended his hand.

"These are *my* letters, Dabney," he said sternly, "stolen from my desk. Who has dared to do this?"

But Uncle Ben had, as if accidentally, interposed his elbow between the master and Seth's spoils.

"Then it 's all right?" he returned deliberately. "I brought 'em here because I thought they might give an idee where my wife was. For them letters is in her own handwrite. You remember ez I told ez how she was a scollard."

The master sat back in his chair white and dumb. In-

credible, extraordinary, and utterly unlooked for as was this revelation, he felt instinctively that it was true.

"I could n't read it myself — ez you know. I did n't keer to ax any one else to read it for me — you kin reckon why, too. And that 's why I 'm troublin' you to-night, Mr. Ford — ez a friend."

The master with a desperate effort recovered his voice. "It is impossible. The lady who wrote those letters does not bear your name. More than that," he added, with hasty irrelevance, "she is so free that she is about to be married, as you might have read. You have made a mistake; the handwriting may be like, but it cannot be really your wife's."

Uncle Ben shook his head slowly. "It 's her'n — there 's no mistake. When a man, Mr. Ford, hez studied that handwrite — havin', so to speak, knowed it on'y from the *outside* — from seein' it passin' like between friends — that man's chances o' bein' mistook ain't ez great ez the man's who on'y takes in the sense of the words that might b'long to everybody. And her name not bein' the same ez mine, don't foller. Ef she got a divorce she 'd take her old gal's name — the name of her fammerly. And that would seem to allow she *did* get a divorce. What mowt she hev called herself when she writ this?"

The master saw his opportunity and rose to it with a chivalrous indignation, that for the moment imposed even upon himself. "I decline to answer that question," he said angrily. "I refuse to allow the name of any woman who honors me with her confidence to be dragged into the infamous outrage that has been committed upon me and common decency. And I shall hold the thief and scoundrel — whoever he may be — answerable to myself in the absence of her natural protector."

Uncle Ben surveyed the hero of these glittering generalities with undisguised admiration. He extended his hand to him gravely.

"Shake! Ef another proof was wantin', Mr. Ford, of that bein' my wife's letter," he said, "that high-toned style of yours would settle it. For, ef thar was one thing she *did* like, it was that sort of po'try. And one reason why her and me did n't get on, and why I skedaddled, was because it was n't in my line. Et 's all in trainin'! On'y a man ez had the Fourth Reader at his fingers' ends could talk like that. Bein' brought up on Dobell — ez is nowhere — it sorter lets me outer you, ez it did outer *her*. But allowin' it ain't the square thing for *you* to mention her name, that would n't be nothin' agin *my* doin' it, and callin' her, well — Lou Price, in a keerless sort o' way, eh?"

"I decline to answer further," replied the master quickly, although his color had changed at the name. "I decline to say another word on the matter until this mystery is cleared up — until I know who dared to break into my desk and steal my property, and the purpose of this unheard-of outrage. And I demand possession of those letters at once."

Uncle Ben without a word put them in the master's hand, to his slight surprise, and it must be added to his faint discomfiture, nor was it decreased when Uncle Ben added, with grave *naïveté* and a patronizing pressure of his hand on his shoulder, — "In course ez you 're taken' it on to yourself, and ez Lou Price ain't got no further call on *me*, they orter be yours. Ez to who got 'em outer the desk, I reckon you ain't got no suspicion of any one spyin' round ye — hev ye?"

In an instant the recollection of Seth Davis's face at the window and the corroboration of Rupert's warning flashed across Ford's mind. The hypothesis that Seth had imagined that they were Cressy's letters, and had thrown them down without reading them when he had found out his mistake, seemed natural. For if he had read them he

would undoubtedly have kept them to show to Cressy. The complex emotions that had disturbed the master on the discovery of Uncle Ben's relationship to the writer of the letters were resolving themselves into a furious rage at Seth. But before he dared revenge himself he must be first assured that Seth was ignorant of their contents. He turned to Uncle Ben.

"I have a suspicion, but to make it certain I must ask you for the present to say nothing of this to any one."

Uncle Ben nodded. "And when you hev found out and you're settled in your mind that you kin make *my* mind easy about this yer Lou Price, ez we 'll call her, bein' divorced squarely, and bein', so to speak, in the way o' gettin' married agin, ye might let me know — ez a friend. I reckon I won't trouble you any more to-night — onless you and me takes another sociable drink together in the bar. No? Well, then, good-night." He moved slowly towards the door. With his hand on the lock he added, "Ef yer writin' to her agin, you might say ez how you found *me* lookin' well and comf'able, and hopin' she 's enjyin' the same blessin'. So long."

He disappeared, leaving the master in a hopeless collapse of conflicting, and, it is to be feared, not very heroic emotions. The situation, which had begun so dramatically, had become suddenly unromantically ludicrous, without, however, losing any of its embarrassing quality. He was conscious that he occupied the singular position of being more ridiculous than the husband — whose invincible and complacent simplicity stung him like the most exquisite irony. For an instant he was almost goaded into the fury of declaring that he had broken off from the writer of the letters forever, but its inconsistency with the chivalrous attitude he had just taken occurred to him in time to prevent him from becoming doubly absurd. His rage with Seth Davis seemed to him the only feeling left that was

genuine and rational, and yet, now that Uncle Ben had gone, even that had a spurious ring. It was necessary for him to lash himself into a fury over the hypothesis that the letters *might* have been Cressy's, and desecrated by that scoundrel's touch. Perhaps he had read them and left them to be picked up by others. He looked over them carefully to see if their meaning would, to the ordinary reader, appear obvious and compromising. His eye fell on the first paragraph.

"I should not be quite fair with you, Jack, if I affected to disbelieve in your faith in your love for me and its endurance, but I should be still more unfair if I did n't tell you what I honestly believe, that at your age you are apt to deceive yourself, and, without knowing it, to deceive others. You confess you have not yet decided upon your career, and you are always looking forward so hopefully, dear Jack, for a change in the future, but you are willing to believe that far more serious things than that will suffer no change in the mean time. If we continued as we were, I, who am older than you and have more experience, might learn the misery of seeing you change towards *me* as I have changed towards another, and for the same reason. If I were sure I could keep pace with you in your dreams and your ambition, if I were sure that I always knew *what* they were, we might still be happy — but I am not sure, and I dare not again risk my happiness on an uncertainty. In coming to my present resolution I do not look for happiness, but at least I know I shall not suffer disappointment, nor involve others in it. I confess I am growing too old not to feel the value to a woman — a necessity to her in this country — of security in her present and future position. Another can give me that. And although you may call this a selfish view of our relations, I believe that you will soon — if you do not even as you read this now — feel the justice of it, and thank me for taking it."

With a smile of scorn he tore up the letter, in what he fondly believed was the bitterness of an outraged trustful nature, forgetting that for many weeks he had scarcely thought of its writer, and that he himself in his conduct had already anticipated its truths.

CHAPTER XII

The master awoke the next morning, albeit after a restless night, with that clarity of conscience and perception which it is to be feared is more often the consequence of youth and a perfect circulation than of any moral conviction or integrity. He argued with himself that as the only party really aggrieved in the incident of the previous night, the right of remedy remained with him solely, and under the benign influence of an early breakfast and the fresh morning air he was inclined to feel less sternly even towards Seth Davis. In any event, he must first carefully weigh the evidence against him, and examine the scene of the outrage closely. For this purpose, he had started for the schoolhouse fully an hour before his usual time. He was even light-hearted enough to recognize the humorous aspect of Uncle Ben's appeal to him, and his own ludicrously paradoxical attitude, and as he at last passed from the dreary flat into the fringe of upland pines, he was smiling. Well for him, perhaps, that he was no more affected by any premonition of the day before him than the lately awakened birds that lightly cut the still sleeping woods around him in their long flashing sabre-curves of flight. A yellow-throat, destined to become the breakfast of a lazy hawk still swinging above the river, was especially moved to such a causeless and idiotic roulade of mirth that the master listening to the foolish bird was fain to whistle too. He presently stopped, however, with a slight embarrassment. For a few paces before him Cressy had unexpectedly appeared.

She had evidently been watching for him. But not with

her usual indolent confidence. There was a strained look of the muscles of her mouth, as of some past repression, and a shaded hollow under her temples beneath the blonde rings of her shorter hair. Her habitually slow, steady eye was troubled, and she cast a furtive glance around her before she searched him with her glance. Without knowing why, yet vaguely fearing that he did, he became still more embarrassed, and in the very egotism of awkwardness, stammered without a further salutation, "A disgraceful thing happened last night, and I 'm up early to find the perpetrator. My desk was broken into, and "—

"I know it," she interrupted, with a half-impatient, half-uneasy putting away of the subject with her little hand — "there — don't go all over it again. Paw and maw have been at me about it all night — ever since those Harrisons, in their anxiousness to make up their quarrel, rushed over with the news. I 'm tired of it!"

For an instant he was staggered. How much had she learned? With the same awkward indirectness, he said vaguely, "But it might have been *your* letters, you know!"

"But it was n't," she said simply. "It *ought* to have been. I wish it had" — She stopped, and again regarded him with a strange expression. "Well," she said slowly, "what are you going to do?"

"To find out the scoundrel who has done this," he said firmly, "and punish him as he deserves."

The almost imperceptible shrug that had raised her shoulders gave way as she regarded him with a look of wearied compassion.

"No," she said gravely, "you cannot. They 're too many for you. You must go away, at once."

"Never," he said indignantly. "Even if it were not a cowardice. It would be more — a confession!"

"Not more than they already know," she said wearily. "But, I tell you, you *must* go. I have sneaked out of the

house and run here all the way to warn you. If you — you care for me, Jack — you will go."

"I should be a traitor to you if I did," he said quickly. "I shall stay."

"But if — if — Jack — if" — she drew nearer him with a new-found timidity, and then suddenly placed her two hands upon his shoulders, "If — if — Jack — *I* were to go with you?"

The old rapt, eager look of possession had come back to her face now; her lips were softly parted. Yet even then she seemed to be waiting some reply more potent than that syllabled on the lips of the man before her.

Howbeit that was the only response. "Darling," he said kissing her, "but would n't that justify them" —

"Stop," she said suddenly. Then putting her hand over his mouth, she continued with the same half-weary expression: "Don't let us go over all that again either. It is *so* tiresome. Listen, dear. You 'll do one or two little things for me — won't you, dandy boy? Don't linger long at the schoolhouse after lessons. Go right home! Don't look after these men *to-day* — to-morrow, Saturday, is your holiday — you know — and you 'll have more time. Keep to yourself to-day as much as you can, dear, for twelve hours — until — until — you hear from me, you know. It will be all right then," she added, lifting her eyelids with a sudden odd resemblance to her father's look of drowsy pain, which Ford had never noticed before. "Promise me that, dear, won't you?"

With a mental reservation he promised hurriedly — preoccupied in his wonder why she seemed to avoid his explanation, in his desire to know what had happened, in the pride that had kept him from asking more or volunteering a defense, and in his still haunting sense of having been wronged. Yet he could not help saying as he caught and held her hand: —

"*You* have not doubted me, Cressy? *You* have not allowed this infamous raking up of things that are past and gone to alter your feelings?"

She looked at him abstractedly. "You think it might alter *anybody's* feelings, then?"

"Nobody's who really loved another" — he stammered.

"Don't let us talk of it any more," she said, suddenly stretching out her arms, lifting them above her head with a wearied gesture, and then letting them fall clasped before her in her old habitual fashion. "It makes my head ache; what with paw and maw and the rest of them — I 'm sick of it all."

She turned away as Ford drew back coldly and let her hand fall from his arm. She took a few steps forward, stopped, ran back to him again, crushed his face and head in a close embrace, and then seemed to dip like a bird into the tall bracken, and was gone.

The master stood for some moments chagrined and bewildered; it was characteristic of his temperament that he had paid less heed to what she told him than what he *imagined* had passed between her mother and herself. She was naturally jealous of the letters — he could forgive her for that; she had doubtless been twitted about them, but he could easily explain them to her parents — as he would have done to her. But he was not such a fool as to elope with her at such a moment, without first clearing his character — and knowing more of hers. And it was equally characteristic of him that in his sense of injury he confounded her with the writer of the letters — as sympathizing with his correspondent in her estimate of his character, and was quite carried away with the belief that he was equally wronged by both.

It was not until he reached the schoolhouse that the evidences of last night's outrage for a time distracted his mind from his singular interview. He was struck with the work-

manlike manner in which the locks had been restored, and the care that had evidently been taken to remove the more obvious and brutal traces of burglary. This somewhat staggered his theory that Seth Davis was the perpetrator; mechanical skill and thoughtfulness were not among the lout's characteristics. But he was still more disconcerted on pushing back his chair to find a small india-rubber tobacco pouch lying beneath it. The master instantly recognized it: he had seen it a hundred times before — it was Uncle Ben's. It was not there when he had closed the room yesterday afternoon. Either Uncle Ben had been there last night or had anticipated him this morning. But in the latter case he would scarcely have overlooked his fallen property — that, in the darkness of the night, might have readily escaped detection. His brow darkened with a sudden conviction that it was Uncle Ben who was the real and only offender, and that his simplicity of the previous night was part of his deception. A sickening sense that he had been again duped — but why or to what purpose he hardly dared to think — overcame him. Who among these strange people could he ever again trust? After the fashion of more elevated individuals, he had accepted the respect and kindness of those he believed his inferiors as a natural tribute to his own superiority; any change in *their* feelings must therefore be hypocrisy or disloyalty; it never occurred to him that *he* might have fallen below their standard.

The arrival of the children and the resumption of his duties for a time diverted him. But although the morning's exercise restored the master's self-confidence, it cannot be said to have improved his judgment. Disdaining to question Rupert Filgee, as the possible confidant of Uncle Ben, he answered the curious inquiries of the children as to the broken door-lock with the remark that it was a matter that he should have to bring before the Trustees of the Board, and by the time that school was over and the pupils dis-

missed he had quite resolved upon this formal disposition of it. In spite of Cressy's warning — rather because of it — in the new attitude he had taken towards her and her friends, he lingered in the schoolhouse until late. He had occupied himself in drawing up a statement of the facts, with an intimation that his continuance in the school would depend upon a rigid investigation of the circumstances, when he was aroused by the clatter of horses' hoofs. The next moment the schoolhouse was surrounded by a dozen men.

He looked up; half of them dismounted and entered the room. The other half remained outside darkening the windows with their motionless figures. Each man carried a gun before him on the saddle; each man wore a rude mask of black cloth partly covering his face.

Although the master was instinctively aware that he was threatened by serious danger, he was far from being impressed by the arms and disguise of his mysterious intruders. On the contrary, the obvious and glaring inconsistency of this cheaply theatrical invasion of the peaceful schoolhouse, of this opposition of menacing figures to the scattered childish primers and text-books that still lay on the desks around him, only extracted from him a half-scornful smile as he coolly regarded them. The fearlessness of ignorance is often as unassailable as the most experienced valor, and the awe-inspiring invaders were at first embarrassed and then humanly angry. A lank figure to the right made a forward movement of impotent rage, but was checked by the evident leader of the party.

"Ef he likes to take it that way, there ain't no Regulators' law agin it, I reckon," he said in a voice which the master instantly recognized as Jim Harrison's, "though ez a gin'ral thing they don't usually find it *fun*." Then turning to the master he added, "Mister Ford, ef that 's the name you go by everywhere, we 're wantin' a man about your size."

Ford knew that he was in hopeless peril. He knew that he was physically defenseless and at the mercy of twelve armed and lawless men. But he retained a preternatural clearness of perception, and audacity born of unqualified scorn for his antagonists, with a feminine sharpness of tongue. In a voice which astonished even himself by its contemptuous distinctness, he said, "My name *is* Ford, but as I only *suppose* your name is Harrison, perhaps you 'll be fair enough to take that rag from your face and show it to me like a man."

The man removed the mask from his face with a slight laugh.

"Thank you," said Ford. "Now, perhaps you will tell me which one of you gentlemen broke into the schoolhouse, forced the lock of my desk, and stole my papers. If he is here I wish to tell him he is not only a thief, but a cur and a coward, for the letters are a woman's — whom he neither knows nor has the right to know."

If he had hoped to force a personal quarrel and trust his life to the chance of a single antagonist, he was disappointed, for although his unexpected attitude had produced some effect among the group, and even attracted the attention of the men at the windows, Harrison strode deliberately towards him.

"That kin wait," he said; "jest now we propose to take you and your letters and drop 'em and you outer this yer township of Injin Springs. You kin take 'em back to the woman or critter you got 'em of. But we kalkilate you 're a little too handy and free in them sorter things to teach school round yer, and we kinder allow we don't keer to hev our gals and boys eddicated up to your high-toned standard. So ef you choose to kem along easy we 'll mak you comf'ble on a hoss we 've got waitin' outside, an' escort you across the line. Ef you don't — we 'll take you anyway."

The master cast a rapid glance around him. In his

quickness of perception he had already noted that the led horse among the cavalcade was fastened by a lariat to one of the riders so that escape by flight was impossible, and that he had not a single weapon to defend himself with or even provoke, in his desperation, the struggle that could forestall ignominy by death. Nothing was left him but his voice, clear and trenchant as he faced them.

"You are twelve to one," he said calmly, "but if there is a single man among you who dare step forward and accuse me of what you only *together* dare do, I will tell him he is a liar and a coward, and stand here ready to make it good against him. You come here as judge and jury condemning me without trial, and confronting me with no accusers; you come here as lawless avengers of your honor, and you dare not give *me* the privilege of as lawlessly defending my own."

There was another slight murmur among the men, but the leader moved impatiently forward. "We 've had enough o' your preachin': we want *you*," he said roughly. "Come."

"Stop," said a dull voice.

It came from a mute figure which had remained motionless among the others. Every eye was turned upon it as it rose and lazily pushed the cloth from its face.

"Hiram McKinstry!" said the others in mingled tones of astonishment and suspicion.

"That 's me!" said McKinstry, coming forward with heavy deliberation. "I joined this yer delegation at the cross-roads instead o' my brother, who had the call. I reckon et 's all the same — or mebbee better. For I perpose to take this yer gentleman off your hands."

He lifted his slumbrous eyes for the first time to the master, and at the same time put himself between him and Harrison. "I perpose," he continued, "to take him at his word; I perpose ter give him a chance to answer with a gun. And ez I reckon, by all accounts, there 's no man yer

ez hez a better right than *me*, I perpose to be the man to put that question to him in the same way. Et may not suit some gents," he continued slowly, facing an angry exclamation from the lank figure behind him, "ez would prefer to hev eleven men to take up *their* private quo'ls, but even then I reckon that the man who is the most injured hez the right to the first say and that man 's *me*."

With a careful deliberation that had a double significance to the malcontents, he handed his own rifle to the master and without looking at him continued: "I reckon, sir, you 've seen that afore, but ef it ain't quite to your hand, any of those gents, I kalkilate, will be high-toned enuff to give you the chyce o' theirs. And there 's no need o' traipsin' beyon' the township lines, to fix this yer affair; I perpose to do it in ten minutes in the brush yonder."

Whatever might have been the feelings and intentions of the men around him, the precedence of McKinstry's right to the duello was a principle too deeply rooted in their traditions to deny; if any resistance to it had been contemplated by some of them, the fact that the master was now armed, and that Mr. McKinstry would quickly do battle at his side with a revolver in defense of his rights, checked any expression. They silently drew back as the master and McKinstry slowly passed out of the schoolhouse together, and then followed in their rear. In that interval the master turned to McKinstry and said in a low voice, "I accept your challenge and thank you for it. You have never done me a greater kindness — whatever I have done to *you* — yet I want you to believe that neither now nor *then* — I meant you any harm."

"Ef you mean by that, sir, that ye reckon you won't return my fire, ye 're blind and wrong. For it will do you no good with them," he said, with a significant wave of his crippled hand towards the following crowd, "nor me neither."

Firmly resolved, however, that he would not fire at McKinstry, and clinging blindly to this which he believed was the last idea of his foolish life, he continued on without another word until they reached the open strip of chemisal that flanked the clearing.

The rude preliminaries were soon settled. The parties armed with rifles were to fire at the word from a distance of eighty yards, and then approach each other, continuing the fight with revolvers until one or the other fell. The selection of seconds was effected by the elder Harrison acting for McKinstry, and after a moment's delay by the volunteering of the long, lank figure previously noted to act for the master. Preoccupied by other thoughts, Mr. Ford paid little heed to his self-elected supporter, who to the others seemed to be only taking that method of showing his contempt for McKinstry's recent insult. The master received the rifle mechanically from his hand and walked to position. He noticed, however, and remembered afterwards that his second was half hidden by the trunk of a large pine to his right that marked the limit of the ground.

In that supreme moment it must be recorded, albeit against all preconceived theory, that he did *not* review his past life, was *not* illuminated by a flash of remorseful or sentimental memory, and did *not* commend his soul to his Maker, but that he was simply and keenly alive to the very actual present in which he still existed and to his one idea of not firing at his adversary. And if anything could render his conduct more theoretically incorrect it was a certain exalted sense that he was doing quite right and was not only *not* a bad sort of a fellow, but one whom his survivors might possibly regret!

"Are you ready, gentlemen? One — two — three — fi . . . !"

The explosions were singularly simultaneous — so remarkable, in fact, that it seemed to the master that his rifle,

fired in the air, had given a *double* report. A light wreath of smoke lay between him and his opponent. He was unhurt — so evidently was his adversary, for the voice rose again.

"Advance ! . . . Hallo there ! Stop ! "

He looked up quickly to see McKinstry stagger and then fall heavily to the ground.

With an exclamation of horror, the first and only terrible emotion he had felt, he ran to the fallen man, as Harrison reached his side at the same moment.

"For God's sake," he said wildly, throwing himself on his knees beside McKinstry, "what has happened ? For I swear to you, I never aimed at you ! I fired in the air. Speak ! Tell him, you," he turned with a despairing appeal to Harrison, "you must have seen it all — tell him it was not me ! "

A half-wondering, half-incredulous smile passed quickly over Harrison's face. "In course you didn't *mean* it," he said dryly, "but let that slide. Get up and get away from yer, while you kin," he added impatiently, with a significant glance at one or two men who lingered after the sudden and general dispersion of the crowd at McKinstry's fall. "Get — will ye ! "

"Never ! " said the young man passionately, "until he knows that it was not my hand that fired that shot."

McKinstry painfully struggled to his elbow. "It took me yere," he said, with a slow deliberation, as if answering some previous question, and pointing to his hip, "and it kinder let me down when I started forward at the second call."

"But it was not I who did it, McKinstry, I swear it. Hear me ! For God's sake, say you believe me."

McKinstry turned his drowsy troubled eyes upon the master as if he were vaguely recalling something. "Stand back thar a minit, will ye," he said to Harrison, with a

languid wave of his crippled hand; "I want ter speak to this yer man."

Harrison drew back a few paces and the master sought to take the wounded man's hand, but he was stopped by a gesture. "Where hev you put Cressy?" McKinstry said slowly.

"I don't understand you," stammered Ford.

"Where are you hidin' her from me?" repeated McKinstry, with painful distinctness. "Whar hev you run her to, that you 're reckonin' to jine her arter — arter — *this?*"

"I am not hiding her! I am not going to her! I do not know where she is. I have not seen her since we parted early this morning without a word of meeting again," said the master rapidly, yet with a bewildered astonishment that was obvious even to the dulled faculties of his hearer.

"That war true?" asked McKinstry, laying his hand upon the master's shoulder and bringing his dull eyes to the level of the young man's.

"It is the whole truth," said Ford fervently, "and true also that I never raised my hand against you."

McKinstry beckoned to Harrison and the two others who had joined him, and then sank partly back with his hand upon his side, where the slow empurpling of his red shirt showed the slight ooze of a deeply seated wound.

"You fellers kin take me over to the ranch," he said calmly, "and let him," pointing to Ford, "ride your best hoss fer the doctor. I don't," he continued in grave explanation, "gin'rally use a doctor, but this yer is suthin' outside the old woman's regular gait." He paused, and then drawing the master's head down towards him, he added in his ear, "When I get to hev a look at the size and shape o' this yer ball that 's in my hip, I 'll — I 'll — I 'll — be — a — little more kam!" A gleam of dull significance strug-

gled into his eye. The master evidently understood him, for he rose quickly, ran to the horse, mounted him, and dashed off for medical assistance, while McKinstry, closing his heavy lids, anticipated this looked-for calm by fainting gently away.

CHAPTER XIII

Of the various sentimental fallacies entertained by adult humanity in regard to childhood, none are more ingeniously inaccurate and gratuitously idiotic than a comfortable belief in its profound ignorance of the events in which it daily moves, and the motives and characters of the people who surround it. Yet even the occasional revelations of an *enfant terrible* are as nothing compared to the perilous secrets which a discreet infant daily buttons up, or secures with a hook and eye, or even fastens with a safety-pin across its gentle bosom. Society can never cease to be grateful for that tact and consideration — qualities more often joined with childish intuition and perception than with matured observation — that they owe to it; and the most accomplished man or woman of the great world might take a lesson from this little audience who receive from their lips the lie they feel too palpable, with round-eyed complacency, or outwardly accept as moral and genuine the hollow sentiment they have overheard rehearsed in private for their benefit.

It was not strange therefore that the little people of the Indian Spring school knew perhaps more of the real relations of Cressy McKinstry to her admirers than the admirers themselves. Not that this knowledge was outspoken — for children rarely gossip in the grown-up sense — or even communicable by words intelligent to the matured intellect. A whisper, a laugh that often seemed vague and unmeaning, conveyed to each other a world of secret significance, and an apparently senseless burst of merriment, in which the whole

class joined, and that the adult critic set down to "animal spirits," — a quality much more rare with children than generally supposed, — was only a sympathetic expression of some discovery happily oblivious to older preoccupation. The childish simplicity of Uncle Ben perhaps appealed more strongly to their sympathy, and although, for that very reason, they regarded him with no more respect than they did each other, he was at times carelessly admitted to their confidence. It was especially Rupert Filgee who extended a kind of patronizing protectorate over him — not unmixed with doubts of his sanity, in spite of the promised confidential clerkship he was to receive from his hands.

On the day of the events chronicled in the preceding chapter, Rupert on returning from school was somewhat surprised to find Uncle Ben perched upon the rail-fence before the humble door of the Filgee mansion and evidently awaiting him. Slowly dismounting as Rupert and Johnny approached, he beamed upon the former for some moments with arch and yet affable mystery.

"Rupey, old man, I s'pose ye 've got yer duds all ready in yer pack, eh ? "

A flush of pleasure passed over the boy's handsome face. He cast, however, a hurried look down on the all-pervading Johnny.

"'Cause ye see we kalkilate to take the down stage to Sacramento at four o'clock," continued Uncle Ben, enjoying Rupert's half-skeptical surprise. "Ye enter into office, so to speak, with me at that hour, when the sellery, seventy-five dollars a month and board, ez private and confidential clerk, begins — eh ? "

Rupert's dimples deepened in charming, almost feminine, embarrassment. "But dad " — he stammered.

"Et 's all right with *him*. He 's agreeable."

"But " —

Uncle Ben followed Rupert's glance at Johnny, who

however appeared to be absorbed in the pattern of Uncle Ben's new trousers.

"That's fixed," he said, with a meaning smile. "There's a sort o' bonus we pays down, you know — for a Chinyman to do the odd jobs."

"And teacher — Mr. Ford — did ye tell him?" said Rupert, brightening.

Uncle Ben coughed slightly. "He's agreeable, too, I reckon. That is," he wiped his mouth meditatively, "he ez good ez allowed it in gin'ral conversation a week ago, Rupe."

A swift shadow of suspicion darkened the boy's brown eyes. "Is anybody else goin' with us?" he said quickly.

"Not this yer trip," replied Uncle Ben complacently. "Ye see, Rupe," he continued, drawing him aside with an air of comfortable mystery, "this yer biz'ness b'longs to the private and confidential branch of the office. From informashun we've received" —

"*We?*" interrupted Rupert.

"'We,' that's the *office*, you know," continued Uncle Ben, with a heavy assumption of business formality, "wot we've received per several hands and consignee — we — that's *you* and *me*, Rupe — we goes down to Sacramento to inquire into the standin' of a certing party, as per invoice, and ter see — ter see — ter negotiate you know, ter find out if she's married or di-vorced," he concluded quickly, as if abandoning for the moment his business manner in consideration of Rupert's inexperience. "We're to find out her standin', Rupe," he began again, with a more judicious blending of ease and technicality, "and her contracts, if any, and where she lives and her way o' life, and examine her books and papers ez to marriages and sich, and arbitrate with her gin'rally in conversation — you inside the house and me out on the pavement, ready to be called in if an interview with business principals is desired."

Observing Rupert somewhat perplexed and confused with these technicalities, he tactfully abandoned them for the present, and consulting a pocket-book said, "I 've made a memorandum of some pints that we 'll talk over on the journey," again charged Rupert to be punctually at the stage office with his carpet-bag, and cheerfully departed.

When he had disappeared Johnny Filgee, without a single word of explanation, fell upon his brother, and at once began a violent attack of kicks and blows upon his legs and other easily accessible parts of his person, accompanying his assault with unintelligible gasps and actions, finally culminating in a flood of tears and the casting of himself on his back in the dust with the copper-fastened toes of his small boots turning imaginary wheels in the air. Rupert received these characteristic marks of despairing and outraged affection with great forbearance, only saying, "There, now, Johnny, quit that," and eventually bearing him still struggling into the house. Here Johnny, declaring that he would kill any "Chinyman" that offered to dress him, and burn down the house after his brother's infamous desertion of it, Rupert was constrained to mingle a few nervous, excited tears with his brother's outbreak. Whereat Johnny, admitting the alleviation of an orange, a four-bladed knife, and the reversionary interest in much of Rupert's personal property, became more subdued. Sitting there with their arms entwined about each other, the sunlight searching the shiftless desolation of their motherless home, the few cheap playthings they had known lying around them, they beguiled themselves with those charming illusions of their future intentions common to their years — illusions they only half believed themselves and half accepted of each other. Rupert was quite certain that he would return in a few days with a gold watch and a present for Johnny, and Johnny, with a baleful vision of never seeing him again, and a catching breath, magnifi-

cently undertook to bring in the wood and build the fire and wash the dishes "all of himself." And then there were a few childish confidences regarding their absent father — then ingenuously playing poker in the Magnolia Saloon — that might have made that public-spirited, genial companion somewhat uncomfortable, and more tears that were half smiling and some brave silences that were wholly pathetic, and then the hour for Rupert's departure all too suddenly arrived. They separated with ostentatious whooping, and then Johnny, suddenly overcome with the dreadfulness of all earthly things, and the hollowness of life generally, instantly resolved to run away!

To do this he prepared himself with a purposeless hatchet, an inconsistent but long-treasured lump of putty, and all the sugar that was left in the cracked sugar-bowl. Thus accoutred he sallied forth, first to remove all traces of his hated existence that might be left in his desk at school. If the master were there he would say Rupert had sent him; if he was n't, he would climb in at the window. The sun was already sinking when he reached the clearing and found a cavalcade of armed men around the building.

Johnny's first conviction was that the master had killed Uncle Ben or Masters, and that the men, taking advantage of the absence of his — Johnny's — big brother, were about to summarily execute him. Observing no struggle from within, his second belief was that the master had been suddenly elected Governor of California and was about to start with a state escort from the schoolhouse, and that he, Johnny, was in time to see the procession. But when the master appeared with McKinstry, followed by part of the crowd afoot, this quick-witted child of the frontier, from his secure outlook in the "brush," gathered enough from their fragmentary speech to guess the serious purport of their errand, and thrill with anticipation and slightly creepy excitement.

A duel! A thing hitherto witnessed only by grown-up men, afterwards swaggering with importance and strange technical bloodthirsty words, and now for the first time reserved for a *boy* — and that boy him, Johnny! — to behold in all its fearful completeness! A duel! of which he, Johnny, meanly abandoned by his brother, was now exalted perhaps to be the only survivor! He could scarcely credit his senses. It was too much!

To creep through the brush while the preliminaries were being settled, reach a certain silver fir on the appointed ground, and, with the aid of his now lucky hatchet, climb unseen to its upper boughs, was an exciting and difficult task, but one eventually overcome by his short but energetic legs. Here he could not only see all that occurred, but by a fortunate chance the large pine next to him had been selected as the limit of the ground. The sharp eyes of the boy had long since penetrated the disguises of the remaining masked men, and when the long, lank figure of the master's self-appointed second took up its position beneath the pines in full view of him, although hidden from the spectators, Johnny instantly recognized it to be none other than Seth Davis. The manifest inconsistency of his appearance as Mr. Ford's second with what Johnny knew of his relations to the master was the one thing that firmly fixed the incident in the boy's memory.

The men were already in position. Harrison stepped forward to give the word. Johnny's down-hanging legs tingled with cramp and excitement. Why did n't they begin? What were they waiting for? What if it were interrupted, or — terrible thought — made up at the last moment? Would they "holler" out when they were hit, or stagger round convulsively as they did at the "cirkiss"? Would they all run away afterwards and leave Johnny alone to tell the tale? And — horrible thought! — would anybody believe him? Would Rupert? Rupert, had he "on'y knowed this," he would n't have gone away.

"One" —

With a child's perfect faith in the invulnerable superiority of his friends, he had not even looked at the master, but only at his destined victim. Yet as the word "two" rang out Johnny's attention was suddenly attracted to the surprising fact that the master's second, Seth Davis, had also drawn a pistol, and from behind his tree was deliberately and stealthily aiming at McKinstry! He understood it all now — he was a friend of the master's. Bully for Seth!

"Three!"

Crack! Z-i-i-p! Crackle! What a funny noise! And yet he was obliged to throw himself flat upon the bough to keep from falling. It seemed to have snapped beneath him and benumbed his right leg. He did not know that the master's bullet, fired in the air, had ranged along the bough, stripping the bark throughout its length, and glancing with half-spent force to inflict a slight flesh-wound on his leg!

He was giddy and a little frightened. And he had seen nobody hit, nor nothin'. It was all a humbug! Seth had disappeared. So had the others. There was a faint sound of voices and a group in the distance — that was all. It was getting dark, too, and his leg was still asleep, but warm and wet. He would get down. This was very difficult, for his leg would not wake up, and but for the occasional support he got by striking his hatchet in the tree he would have fallen in descending. When he reached the ground his leg began to pain, and looking down he saw that his stocking and shoe were soaked with blood.

His small and dirty handkerchief, a hard wad in his pocket, was insufficient to stanch the flow. With a vague recollection of a certain poultice applied to a boil on his father's neck, he collected a quantity of soft moss and dried yerba buena leaves, and with the aid of his check apron

and of one of his torn suspenders tightly wound round the whole mass, achieved a bandage of such elephantine proportions that he could scarcely move with it. In fact, like most imaginative children, he became slightly terrified at his own alarming precautions. Nevertheless, although a word or an outcry from him would have at that moment brought the distant group to his assistance, a certain respect to himself and his brother kept him from uttering even a whimper of weakness.

Yet he found refuge, oddly enough, in a suppressed but bitter denunciation of the other boys of his acquaintance. What was Cal. Harrison doing, while he, Johnny, was alone in the woods, wounded in a grown-up duel? — for nothing would convince this doughty infant that he had not been an active participant. Where was Jimmy Snyder that he did n't come to his assistance with the other fellers? Cowards all; they were afraid. Ho, ho! And he, Johnny, was n't afraid! ho — he did n't mind it! Nevertheless he had to repeat the phrase two or three times until, after repeated struggles to move forward through the brush, he at last sank down exhausted. By this time the distant group had slowly moved away, carrying something between them, and leaving Johnny alone in the fast coming darkness. Yet even this desertion did not affect him as strongly as his implicit belief in the cowardly treachery of his old associates.

It grew darker and darker, until the open theatre of the late conflict appeared inclosed in funereal walls; a cool searching breath of air, that seemed to have crept through the bracken and undergrowth like a stealthy animal, lifted the curls on his hot forehead. He grasped his hatchet firmly as against possible wild beasts, and as a medicinal and remedial precaution, took another turn with his suspender around his bandage. It occurred to him then that he would probably die. They would all feel exceedingly sorry and alarmed, and regret having made him wash himself on

Saturday night. They would attend his funeral in large numbers in the little graveyard, where a white tombstone inscribed to "John Filgee, fell in a duel at the age of seven," would be awaiting him. He would forgive his brother, his father, and Mr. Ford. Yet even then he vaguely resented a few leaves and twigs dropped by a woodpecker in the tree above him, with a shake of his weak fist and an incoherent declaration that they could n't "play no babes in the wood on *him*." And then having composed himself he once more turned on his side to die, as became the scion of a heroic race! The free woods, touched by an upspringing wind, waved their dark arms above him, and higher yet a few patient stars silently ranged themselves around his pillow.

But with the rising wind and stars came the swift trampling of horses' hoofs and the flashing of lanterns, and Dr. Duchesne and the master swept down into the opening.

"It was here," said the master quickly, "but they must have taken him on to his own home. Let us follow."

"Hold on a moment," said the doctor, who had halted before the tree. "What 's all this? Why, it 's baby Filgee — by thunder!"

In another moment they had both dismounted and were leaning over the half-conscious child. Johnny turned his feverishly bright eyes from the lantern to the master and back again.

"What is it, Johnny boy?" asked the master tenderly. "Were you lost?"

With a gleam of feverish exaltation, Johnny rose, albeit wanderingly, to the occasion!

"Hit!" he lisped feebly — "hit in a doell! at the age of theven."

"What!" asked the bewildered master.

But Dr. Duchesne, after a single swift scrutiny of the boy's face, had unearthed him from his nest of leaves, laid

him in his lap, and deftly ripped away the preposterous bandage. "Hold the light here. By Jove! he tells the truth. Who did it, Johnny?"

But Johnny was silent. In an interval of feverish consciousness and pain, his perception and memory had been quickened; a suspicion of the real cause of his disaster had dawned upon him — but his childish lips were heroically sealed. The master glanced appealingly at the doctor.

"Take him before you in the saddle to McKinstry's," said the latter promptly. "I can attend to both."

The master lifted the boy tenderly in his arms. Johnny, stimulated by the prospect of a free ride, became feebly interested in his fellow sufferer.

"Did Theth hit him bad?" he asked.

"Seth?" echoed the master wildly.

"Yeth. I theed him when he took aim."

The master did not reply, but the next moment Johnny felt himself clasped in his arms in the saddle before him, borne like a whirlwind in the direction of the McKinstry ranch.

CHAPTER XIV

They found the wounded man lying in the front room upon a rudely extemporized couch of bearskins, he having sternly declined the effeminacy of his wife's bedroom. In the possibility of a fatal termination to his wound, and in obedience to a grim frontier tradition, he had also refused to have his boots removed in order that he might "die with them on," as became his ancestral custom. Johnny was therefore speedily made comfortable in the McKinstry bed, while Dr. Duchesne gave his whole attention to his more serious patient. The master glanced hurriedly around for Mrs. McKinstry. She was not only absent from the room, but there seemed to be no suggestion of her presence in the house. To his greater surprise the hurried inquiry that rose to his lips was checked by a significant warning from the attendant. He sat down beside the now sleeping boy, and awaited the doctor's return with his mind wandering between the condition of the little sufferer and the singular revelation that had momentarily escaped his childish lips. If Johnny had actually seen Seth fire at McKinstry, the latter's mysterious wound was accounted for — but not Seth's motive. The act was so utterly incomprehensible and inconsistent with Seth's avowed hatred of the master that the boy must have been delirious.

He was roused by the entrance of the surgeon. "It 's not so bad as I thought," he said, with a reassuring nod. "It was a mighty close shave between a shattered bone and a severed artery, but we 've got the ball, and he 'll pull through in a week. By Jove! though — the old fire-eater

was more concerned about finding the ball than living or dying! Go in there — he wants to see you. Don't let him talk too much. He 's called in a lot of his friends for some reason or other — and there 's a regular mass-meeting in there. Go in, and get rid of 'em. I 'll look after baby Filgee — though the little chap will be all right again after another dressing."

The master cast a hurried look of relief at the surgeon, and reëntered the front room. It was filled with men whom the master instinctively recognized as his former adversaries. But they gave way before him with a certain rude respect and half-abashed sympathy as McKinstry called him to his side. The wounded man grasped his hand. "Lift me up a bit," he whispered. The master assisted him with difficulty to his elbow.

"Gentlemen!" said McKinstry, with a characteristic wave of his crippled hand towards the crowd as he laid the other on the master's shoulder. "Ye heerd me talkin' a minit ago; ye heer me now. This yer young man as we 've slipped up on and meskalkilated has told the truth — every time! Ye ken tie to him whenever and wherever ye want to. Ye ain't expected to feel ez I feel, in course, but the man ez goes back on *him* — quo'ls with *me*. That 's all — and thanks for inquiring friends. Ye 'll git now, boys, and leave him a minit with me."

The men filed slowly out, a few lingering long enough to shake the master's hand with grave earnestness, or half-smiling, half-abashed embarrassment. The master received the proffered reconciliation of these men, who but a few hours before would have lynched him with equal sincerity, with cold bewilderment. As the door closed on the last of the party he turned to McKinstry. The wounded man had sunk down again, but was regarding with drowsy satisfaction a leaden bullet he was holding between his finger and thumb.

"This yer shot, Mr. Ford," he said in a slow voice, whose

weakness was only indicated by its extreme deliberation, "never kem from the gun I gave ye — and was never fired by you." He paused, and then added with his old dull abstraction, "It 's a long time since I 've run agin anythin' that makes me feel more — kam."

In Mr. McKinstry's weak condition the master did not dare to make Johnny's revelation known to him, and contented himself by simply pressing his hand, but the next moment the wounded man resumed : —

"That ball jest fits Seth's navy revolver — and the hound hes made tracks outer the country."

"But what motive could he have in attacking *you* at such a time ? " asked the master.

"He reckoned that either I 'd kill you and so he 'd got shut of us both in that way, without it being noticed ; or if I missed you, the others would hang *you* — ez they kalkilated to — for killing *me !* The idea kem to him when he overheard you hintin' you would n't return my fire."

A shuddering conviction that McKinstry had divined the real truth passed over the master. In the impulse of the moment he again would have corroborated it by revealing Johnny's story, but a glance at the growing feverishness of the wounded man checked his utterance. "Don't talk of it now," he said hurriedly. "Enough for me to know that you acquit *me.* I am here now only to beg you to compose yourself until the doctor comes back — as you seemed to be alone, and Mrs. McKinstry" — he stopped in awkward embarrassment.

A singular confusion overspread the invalid's face. "She hed stept out afore this happened, owin' to contrairy opinions betwixt me and her. Ye mout hev noticed, Mr. Ford, that gin'rally she did n't 'pear to cotton to ye ! Thar ain't a woman a-goin' ez is the ekal of Blair Rawlins' darter in nussin' a man and keeping him in fightin' order, but in matters like things that consarn herself and Cress, I begin

to think, Mr. Ford, that somehow she ain't exakly — kam! Bein' kam yourself, ye 'll put any unpleasantness down to that. Wotever you hear from *her*, and, for the matter o' that, from her own darter too — for I 'm takin' back the foolishness I said to ye over yon about your runnin' off with Cress — you 'll remember, Mr. Ford, it warn't from no ill feeling to *you*, in her or Cress — but on'y a want of kam! I mout hev had *my* idees about Cress, you mout hev had *yours*, and that fool Dabney mout hev had *his;* but it warn't the old woman's — nor Cressy's — it warn't Blair Rawlins' darter's idea — nor yet *her* darter's! And why? For want o' kam! Times I reckon it was left out o' woman's nater. And bein' kam yourself, you understand it, and take it all in."

The old look of drowsy pain had settled so strongly in his red eyes again that the master was fain to put his hand gently over them, and with a faint smile beg him to compose himself to sleep. This he finally did after a whispered suggestion that he himself was feeling " more kam." The master sat for some moments with his hand upon the sleeping man's eyes, and a vague and undefinable sense of loneliness seemed to fall upon him from the empty rafters of the silent and deserted house. The rising wind moaned fitfully around its bleak shell with the despairing sound of far and forever receding voices. So strong was the impression that when the doctor and McKinstry's attending brother reëntered the room, the master still lingered beside the bed with a dazed sensation of abandonment that the doctor's practical reassuring smile could hardly dispel.

" He 's doing splendidly now," he said, listening to the sleeper's more regular respiration: " and I 'd advise you to go now, Mr. Ford, before he wakes, lest he might be tempted to excite himself by talking to you again. He 's really quite out of danger now. Good-night! I 'll drop in on you at the hotel when I return."

The master, albeit still confused and bewildered, felt his way to the door and out into the open night. The wind was still despairingly wrestling with the tree-tops, but the far receding voices seemed to be growing fainter in the distance, until, as he passed on, they too seemed to pass away forever.

. . . . . .

Monday morning had come again, and the master was at his desk in the schoolhouse early, with a still damp and inky copy of the "Star" fresh from the press before him. The free breath of the pines was blowing in the window, and bringing to his ears the distant voices of his slowly gathering flock, as he read as follows: —

"The perpetrator of the dastardly outrage at the Indian Springs Academy on Thursday last — which, through unfortunate misrepresentation of the facts, led to a premature calling out of several of our most public-spirited citizens, and culminated in a most regrettable encounter between Mr. McKinstry and the accomplished and estimable principal of the school — has, we regret to say, escaped condign punishment by leaving the country with his relations. If, as is seriously whispered, he was also guilty of an unparalleled offense against a chivalrous code which will exclude him in the future from ever seeking redress at the Court of Honor, our citizens will be only too glad to get rid of the contamination of being obliged to arrest him. Those of our readers who know the high character of the two gentlemen who were thus forced into a hostile meeting, will not be surprised to know that the most ample apologies were tendered on both sides, and that the *entente cordiale* has been thoroughly restored. The bullet — which it is said played a highly important part in the subsequent explanation, proving to have come from a *revolver* fired by some outsider — has been extracted from Mr. McKinstry's thigh, and he is doing well, with every prospect of a speedy recovery."

Smiling, albeit not uncomplacently, at this valuable contribution to history from an unfettered press, his eye fell upon the next paragraph, perhaps not so complacently: —

"Benjamin Daubigny, Esq., who left town for Sacramento on important business, not entirely unconnected with his new interests in Indian Springs, will, it is rumored, be shortly joined by his wife, who has been enabled by his recent good fortune to leave her old home in the States, and take her proper proud position at his side. Although personally unknown to Indian Springs, Mrs. Daubigny is spoken of as a beautiful and singularly accomplished woman, and it is to be regretted that her husband's interests will compel them to abandon Indian Springs for Sacramento as a future residence. Mr. Daubigny was accompanied by his private secretary Rupert, the eldest son of H. G. Filgee, Esq., who has been a promising graduate of the Indian Springs Academy, and offers a bright example to the youth of this district. We are happy to learn that his younger brother is recovering rapidly from a slight accident received last week through the incautious handling of firearms."

The master, with his eyes upon the paper, remained so long plunged in a reverie that the schoolroom was quite filled and his little flock was wonderingly regarding him before he recalled himself. He was hurriedly reaching his hand towards the bell when he was attracted by the rising figure of Octavia Dean.

"Please, sir, you did n't ask if we had any news!"

"True — I forgot," said the master, smiling. "Well, have you anything to tell us?"

"Yes, sir. Cressy McKinstry has left school."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir; she 's married."

"Married," repeated the master, with an effort, yet conscious of the eyes concentrated upon his colorless face. "Married — and to whom?"

"To Joe Masters, sir, at the Baptist Chapel at Big Bluff, Sunday, an' Ma'am McKinstry was thar with her."

There was a momentary and breathless pause. Then the voices of his little pupils — those sage and sweet truants from tradition, those gentle but relentless historians of the future — rose around him in shrill chorus : —

"*Why, we knowed it all along, sir!*"

A WARD OF THE GOLDEN GATE

PROLOGUE

In San Francisco the "rainy season" had been making itself a reality to the wondering Eastern immigrant. There were short days of drifting clouds and flying sunshine, and long succeeding nights of incessant downpour, when the rain rattled on the thin shingles or drummed on the resounding zinc of pioneer roofs. The shifting sand-dunes on the outskirts were beaten motionless and sodden by the onslaught of consecutive storms; the southeast trades brought the saline breath of the outlying Pacific even to the busy haunts of Commercial and Kearney streets; the low-lying Mission road was a quagmire; along the City Front, despite of piles and pier and wharf, the Pacific tides still asserted themselves in mud and ooze as far as Sansome Street; the wooden sidewalks of Clay and Montgomery streets were mere floating bridges or buoyant pontoons superposed on elastic bogs; Battery Street was the Silurian beach of that early period on which tin cans, packing-boxes, freight, household furniture, and even the runaway crews of deserted ships had been cast away. There were dangerous and unknown depths in Montgomery Street and on the Plaza, and the wheels of a passing carriage hopelessly mired had to be lifted by the volunteer hands of a half-dozen high-booted wayfarers, whose wearers were sufficiently content to believe that a woman, a child, or an invalid was behind its closed windows, without troubling themselves or the occupant by looking through the glass.

It was a carriage that, thus released, eventually drew up

before the superior public edifice known as the City Hall. From it a woman, closely veiled, alighted, and quickly entered the building. A few passers-by turned to look at her, partly from the rarity of the female figure at that period, and partly from the greater rarity of its being well formed and even ladylike.

As she kept her way along the corridor and ascended an iron staircase, she was passed by others more preoccupied in business at the various public offices. One of these visitors, however, stopped as if struck by some fancied resemblance in her appearance, turned, and followed her. But when she halted before a door marked "Mayor's Office," he paused also, and, with a look of half-humorous bewilderment and a slight glance around him as if seeking for some one to whom to impart his arch fancy, he turned away. The woman then entered a large anteroom with a certain quick feminine gesture of relief, and, finding it empty of other callers, summoned the porter, and asked him some question in a voice so suppressed by the official severity of the apartment as to be hardly audible. The attendant replied by entering another room marked "Mayor's Secretary," and reappeared with a stripling of seventeen or eighteen, whose singularly bright eyes were all that was youthful in his composed features. After a slight scrutiny of the woman — half boyish, half official — he desired her to be seated, with a certain exaggerated gravity as if he was overacting a grown-up part, and, taking a card from her, reentered his office. Here, however, he did *not* stand on his head or call out a confederate youth from a closet, as the woman might have expected. To the left was a green baize door, outlined with brass-studded rivets like a cheerful coffin-lid, and bearing the mortuary inscription, "Private." This he pushed open, and entered the Mayor's private office.

The municipal dignitary of San Francisco, although an

erect, soldier-like man of strong middle age, was seated with his official chair tilted back against the wall and kept in position by his feet on the rungs of another, which in turn acted as a support for a second man, who was seated a few feet from him in an easy-chair. Both were lazily smoking.

The Mayor took the card from his secretary, glanced at it, said "Hullo!" and handed it to his companion, who read aloud "Kate Howard," and gave a prolonged whistle.

"Where is she?" asked the Mayor.

"In the anteroom, sir."

"Any one else there?"

"No, sir."

"Did you say I was engaged?"

"Yes, sir; but it appears she asked Sam who was with you, and when he told her, she said, All right, she wanted to see Colonel Pendleton too."

The men glanced interrogatively at each other, but Colonel Pendleton, abruptly anticipating the Mayor's functions, said, "Have her in," and settled himself back in his chair.

A moment later the door opened, and the stranger appeared. As she closed the door behind her she removed her heavy veil, and displayed the face of a very handsome woman of past thirty. It is only necessary to add that it was a face known to the two men, and all San Francisco.

"Well, Kate," said the Mayor, motioning to a chair, but without rising or changing his attitude. "Here I am, and here is Colonel Pendleton, and these are office hours. What can we do for you?"

If he had received her with magisterial formality, or even politely, she would have been embarrassed, in spite of a certain boldness of her dark eyes and an ever present consciousness of her power. It is possible that his own ease and that of his companion was part of their instinctive

good nature and perception. She accepted it as such, took the chair familiarly, and seated herself sideways upon it, her right arm half encircling its back and hanging over it; altogether an easy and not ungraceful pose.

"Thank you, Jack — I mean, Mr. Mayor — and you, too, Harry. I came on business. I want you two men to act as guardians for my little daughter."

"Your what?" asked the two men simultaneously.

"My daughter," she repeated, with a short laugh, which, however, ended with a note of defiance. "Of course you don't know. Well," she added half aggressively, and yet with the air of hurrying over a compromising and inexplicable weakness, "the long and short of it is I've got a little girl down at the Convent of Santa Clara, and have had — there! I've been taking care of her — *good* care, too, boys — for some time. And now I want to put things square for her for the future. See? I want to make over to her all my property — it's nigh on to seventy-five thousand dollars, for Bob Snelling put me up to getting those water lots a year ago — and, you see, I'll have to have regular guardians, trustees, or whatever you call 'em, to take care of the money for her."

"Who's her father?" asked the Mayor.

"What's that to do with it?" she said impetuously.

"Everything — because he's her natural guardian."

"Suppose he is n't known? Say dead, for instance."

"Dead will do," said the Mayor gravely. "Yes, dead will do," repeated Colonel Pendleton. After a pause, in which the two men seemed to have buried this vague relative, the Mayor looked keenly at the woman.

"Kate, have you and Bob Ridley had a quarrel?"

"Bob Ridley knows too much to quarrel with me," she said briefly.

"Then you are doing this for no motive other than that which you tell me?"

"Certainly. That 's motive enough — ain't it ?"

"Yes." The Mayor took his feet off his companion's chair and sat upright. Colonel Pendleton did the same, also removing his cigar from his lips. "I suppose you 'll think this thing over ?" he added.

"No — I want it done *now* — right here — in this office."

"But you know it will be irrevocable."

"That 's what I want it — something might happen afterwards."

"But you are leaving nothing for yourself, and if you are going to devote everything to this daughter and lead a different life, you 'll" —

"Who said I was ?"

The two men paused, and looked at her.

"Look here, boys, you don't understand. From the day that paper is signed, I 've nothing to do with the child. She passes out of my hands into yours, to be schooled, educated, and made a rich girl out of — and never to know who or what or where *I* am. She does n't know now. I have n't given her and myself away in that style — you bet ! She thinks I 'm only a friend. She has n't seen me more than once or twice, and not to know me again. Why, I was down there the other day, and passed her walking out with the Sisters and the other scholars, and she did n't know me — though one of the Sisters did. But they 're mum — *they* are, and don't let on. Why, now I think of it, *you* were down there, Jack, presiding in big style as Mr. Mayor at the exercises. You must have noticed her. Little thing, about nine — lot of hair, the same color as mine, and brown eyes. White and yellow sash. Had a necklace on of real pearls I gave her. *I bought them*, you understand, myself at Tucker's — gave two hundred and fifty dollars for them — and a big bouquet of white rosebuds and lilacs I sent her."

"I remember her now on the platform," said the Mayor gravely. "So that is your child?"

"You bet — no slouch either. But that 's neither here nor there. What I want now is you and Harry to look after her and her property the same as if I did n't live. More than that, as if I had *never lived*. I 've come to you two boys, because I reckon you 're square men and won't give me away. But I want to fix it even firmer than that. I want you to take hold of this trust not as Jack Hammersley, but as the *Mayor of San Francisco!* And when you make way for a new Mayor, *he* takes up the trust by virtue of his office, you see, so there 's a trustee all along. I reckon there 'll always be a San Francisco and always a Mayor — at least till the child 's of age; and it gives her from the start a father, and a pretty big one too. Of course the new man is n't to know the why and wherefore of this. It 's enough for him to take on that duty with his others, without asking questions. And he 's only got to invest that money and pay it out as it 's wanted, and consult Harry at times."

The two men looked at each other with approving intelligence. "But have you thought of a successor for *me*, in case somebody shoots me on sight any time in the next ten years?" asked Pendleton, with a gravity equal to her own.

"I reckon, as you 're President of the El Dorado Bank, you 'll make that a part of every president's duty too. You 'll get the directors to agree to it, just as Jack here will get the Common Council to make it the Mayor's business."

The two men had risen to their feet, and, after exchanging glances, gazed at her silently. Presently the Mayor said: —

"It can be done, Kate, and we 'll do it for you — eh, Harry?"

"Count me in," said Pendleton, nodding.

"But you 'll want a third man."

"What 's that for?"

"The casting vote in case of any difficulty."

The woman's face fell. "I reckoned to keep it a secret with only you two," she said half bitterly.

"No matter. We 'll find some one to act, or you 'll think of somebody and let us know."

"But I wanted to finish this thing right here," she said impatiently. She was silent for a moment, with her arched black brows knitted. Then she said abruptly, "Who 's that smart little chap that let me in? He looks as if he might be trusted."

"That 's Paul Hathaway, my secretary. He 's sensible, but too young. Stop! I don't know about that. There 's no legal age necessary, and he 's got an awfully old head on him," said the Mayor thoughtfully.

"And *I* say his youth 's in his favor," said Colonel Pendleton promptly. "He 's been brought up in San Francisco, and he 's got no d—d old-fashioned Eastern notions to get rid of, and will drop into this as a matter of business, without prying about or wondering. *I'll* serve with him."

"Call him in!" said the woman.

He came. Very luminous of eye, and composed of lip and brow. Yet with the same suggestion of "making believe" very much, as if to offset the possible munching of forbidden cakes and apples in his own room, or the hidden presence of some still in his pocket.

The Mayor explained the case briefly, but with business-like precision. "Your duty, Mr. Hathaway," he concluded, "at present will be merely nominal and, above all, confidential. Colonel Pendleton and myself will set the thing going." As the youth — who had apparently taken in and "illuminated" the whole subject with a single bright-eyed

glance — bowed and was about to retire, as if to relieve himself of his real feelings behind the door, the woman stopped him with a gesture.

"Let 's have this thing over now," she said to the Mayor. "You draw up something that we can all sign at once." She fixed her eyes on Paul, partly to satisfy her curiosity and justify her predilection for him, and partly to detect him in any overt act of boyishness. But the youth simply returned her glance with a cheerful, easy prescience, as if her past lay clearly open before him. For some minutes there was only the rapid scratching of the Mayor's pen over the paper. Suddenly he stopped and looked up.

"What 's her name?"

"She must n't have mine," said the woman quickly. "That 's a part of my idea. I give that up with the rest. She must take a new name that gives no hint of me. Think of one, can't you, you two men? Something that would kind of show that she was the daughter of the city, you know."

"You could n't call her 'Santa Francisca,' eh?" said Colonel Pendleton doubtingly.

"Not much," said the woman, with a seriousness that defied any ulterior insinuation.

"Nor Chrysopolinia?" said the Mayor musingly.

"But that 's only a *first* name. She must have a family name," said the woman impatiently.

"Can *you* think of something, Paul?" said the Mayor, appealing to Hathaway. "You 're a great reader, and later from your classics than I am." The Mayor, albeit practical and Western, liked to be ostentatiously forgetful of his old Alma Mater, Harvard, on occasions.

"How would Yerba Buena do, sir?" responded the youth gravely. "It 's the old Spanish title of the first settlement here. It comes from the name that Father Junipero Serra gave to the pretty little vine that grows wild

over the sandhills, and means 'good herb.' He called it 'A balm for the wounded and sore.'"

"For the wounded and sore?" repeated the woman slowly.

"That 's what they say," responded Hathaway.

"You ain't playing us, eh?" she said, with a half laugh that, however, scarcely curved the open mouth with which she had been regarding the young secretary.

"No," said the Mayor hurriedly. "It 's true. I 've often heard it. And a capital name it would be for her too. Yerba the first name. Buena the second. She could be called Miss Buena when she grows up."

"Yerba Buena it is," she said suddenly. Then, indicating the youth with a slight toss of her handsome head, "His head 's level — you can see that."

There was a silence again, and the scratching of the Mayor's pen continued. Colonel Pendleton buttoned up his coat, pulled his long mustache into shape, slightly arranged his collar, and walked to the window without looking at the woman. Presently the Mayor arose from his seat, and, with a certain formal courtesy that had been wanting in his previous manner, handed her his pen and arranged his chair for her at the desk. She took the pen, and rapidly appended her signature to the paper. The others followed; and, obedient to a sign from him, the porter was summoned from the outer office to witness the signatures. When this was over, the Mayor turned to his secretary. "That 's all just now, Paul."

Accepting this implied dismissal with undisturbed gravity, the newly made youthful guardian bowed and retired. When the green baize door had closed upon him, the Mayor turned abruptly to the woman with the paper in his hand.

"Look here, Kate; there is still time for you to reconsider your action, and tear up this solitary record of it. If you choose to do so, say so, and I promise you that this

interview, and all you have told us, shall never pass beyond these walls. No one will be the wiser for it, and we will give you full credit for having attempted something that was too much for you to perform."

She had half risen from her chair when he began, but fell back again in her former position and looked impatiently from him to his companion, who was also regarding her earnestly.

"What are you talking about?" she said sharply.

"*You*, Kate," said the Mayor. "You have given everything you possess to this child. What provision have you made for yourself?"

"Do I look played out?" she said, facing them.

She certainly did not look like anything but a strong, handsome, resolute woman; but the men did not reply.

"That is not all, Kate," continued the Mayor, folding his arms and looking down upon her. "Have you thought what this means? It is the complete renunciation not only of any claim, but any interest in your child. That is what you have just signed, and what it will be our duty now to keep you to. From this moment we stand between you and her, as we stand between her and the world. Are you ready to see her grow up away from you, losing even the little recollection she has had of your kindness — passing you in the street without knowing you, perhaps even having you pointed out to her as a person she should avoid? Are you prepared to shut your eyes and ears henceforth to all that you may hear of her new life, when she is happy, rich, respectable, a courted heiress — perhaps the wife of some great man? Are you ready to accept that she will never know — that no one will ever know — that you had any share in making her so, and that if you should ever breathe it abroad we shall hold it our duty to deny it, and brand the man who takes it up for you as a liar and the slanderer of an honest girl?"

"That's what I came here for," she said curtly; then, regarding them curiously, and running her ringed hand up and down the railed back of her chair, she added, with a half laugh, "What are you playin' me for, boys?"

"But," said Colonel Pendleton, without heeding her, "are you ready to know that in sickness or affliction you will be powerless to help her; that a stranger will take your place at her bedside; that as she has lived without knowing you she will die without that knowledge, or that if through any weakness of yours it came to her then, it would imbitter her last thoughts of earth and, dying, she would curse you?"

The smile upon her half-open mouth still fluttered around it, and her curved fingers still ran up and down the rails of the chair-back as if they were the chords of some mute instrument, to which she was trying to give voice. Her rings once or twice grated upon them as if she had at times gripped them closely. But she rose quickly when he paused, said "Yes" sharply, and put the chair back against the wall.

"Then I will send you copies of this to-morrow, and take an assignment of the property."

"I've got the check here for it now," she said, drawing it from her pocket and laying it upon the desk. "There, I reckon that's finished. Good-by!"

The Mayor took up his hat, Colonel Pendleton did the same; both men preceded her to the door, and held it open with grave politeness for her to pass.

"Where are you boys going?" she asked, glancing from the one to the other.

"To see you to your carriage, Mrs. Howard," said the Mayor in a voice that had become somewhat deeper.

"Through the whole building? Past all the people in the hall and on the stairs? Why, I passed Dan Stewart as I came in."

"If you will allow us?" he said, turning half appealing to Colonel Pendleton, who, without speaking, made a low bow of assent.

A slight flush rose to her face — the first and only change in the even healthy color she had shown during the interview.

"I reckon I won't trouble you, boys, if it 's all the same to you," she said, with her half-strident laugh. "*You* might n't mind being seen — but *I* would. Good-by."

She held out a hand to each of the men, who remained for an instant silently holding them. Then she passed out of the door, slipping on her close black veil as she did so with a half-funereal suggestion, and they saw her tall, handsome figure fade into the shadows of the long corridor.

"Paul," said the Mayor, reëntering the office and turning to his secretary, "do you know who that woman is?"

"Yes, sir."

"She 's one in a million! And now forget that you have ever seen her."

CHAPTER I

The principal parlor of the New Golden Gate Hotel in San Francisco, fairly reported by the local press as being "truly palatial" in its appointments, and unrivaled in its upholstery, was, nevertheless, on August 5, 1860, of that startling newness that checked any familiarity, and evidently had produced some embarrassment on the limbs of four visitors who had just been ushered into its glories. After hesitating before one or two gorgeous fawn-colored brocaded easy-chairs of appalling and spotless virginity, one of them seated himself despairingly on a *tête-à-tête* sofa in marked and painful isolation, while another sat uncomfortably upright on a sofa. The two others remained standing, vaguely gazing at the ceiling, and exchanging ostentatiously admiring but hollow remarks about the furniture in unnecessary whispers. Yet they were apparently men of a certain habit of importance and small authority, with more or less critical attitude in their speech.

To them presently entered a young man of about five-and-twenty, with remarkably bright and singularly sympathetic eyes. Having swept the group in a smiling glance, he singled out the lonely occupier of the *tête-à-tête*, and moved pleasantly towards him. The man rose instantly with an eager gratified look.

"Well, Paul, I did n't allow you 'd remember me. It 's a matter of four years since we met at Marysville. And now you 're bein' a great man you 've" —

No one could have known from the young man's smiling face that he really had not recognized his visitor at first,

and that his greeting was only an exhibition of one of those happy instincts for which he was remarkable. But, following the clue suggested by his visitor, he was able to say promptly and gayly : —

"I don't know why I should forget Tony Shear or the Marysville boys," turning with a half-confiding smile to the other visitors, who, after the human fashion, were beginning to be resentfully impatient of this special attention.

"Well, no, — for I 've allus said that you took your first start from Marysville. But I 've brought a few friends of our party that I reckoned to introduce to you. Cap'n Stidger, Chairman of our Central Committee, Mr. Henry J. Hoskins, of the firm of Hoskins and Bloomer, and Joe Slate, of the 'Union Press,' one of our most promising journalists. Gentlemen," he continued, suddenly and without warning lifting his voice to an oratorical plane in startling contrast to his previous unaffected utterance, "I need n't say that this is the Honorable Paul Hathaway, the youngest state senator in the Legislature. You know his record!" Then, recovering the ordinary accents of humanity he added, "We read of your departure last night from Sacramento, and I thought we 'd come early, afore the crowd."

"Proud to know you, sir," said Captain Stidger, suddenly lifting the conversation to the platform again. "I have followed your career, sir. I 've read your speech, Mr. Hathaway, and, as I was telling our mutual friend, Mr. Shear, as we came along, I don't know any man that could state the real party issues as squarely. Your castigating exposition of so-called Jeffersonian principles, and your relentless indictment of the resolutions of '98, were — were" — coughed the captain, dropping into conversation again — "were the biggest thing out. You have only to signify the day, sir, that you will address us, and I can promise you the largest audience in San Francisco."

"I 'm instructed by the proprietor of the 'Union Press,'"

said Mr. Slate, feeling for his notebook and pencil, "to offer you its columns for any explanations you may desire to make in the form of a personal letter or an editorial in reply to the 'Advertiser's' strictures on your speech, or to take any information you may have for the benefit of our readers and the party."

"If you are ever down my way, Mr. Hathaway," said Mr. Hoskins, placing a large business card in Hathaway's hand, "and will drop in as a friend, I can show you about the largest business in the way of canned provisions and domestic groceries in the State, and give you a look around Battery Street generally. Or if you 'll name your day, I 've got a pair of 2.35 Blue Grass horses that 'll spin you out to the Cliff House to dinner and back. I 've had Governor Fiske, and Senator Doolan, and that big English capitalist who was here last year, and they — well, sir, — they were *pleased!* Or if you 'd like to see the town — if this is your first visit — I 'm a hand to show you."

Nothing could exceed Mr. Hathaway's sympathetic acceptance of their courtesies, nor was there the least affectation in it. Thoroughly enjoying his fellow men, even in their foibles, they found him irresistibly attractive. "I lived here seven years ago," he said, smiling, to the last speaker.

"When the water came up to Montgomery Street," interposed Mr. Shear in a hoarse but admiring aside.

"When Mr. Hammersley was Mayor," continued Hathaway.

"Had an official position — private secretary — afore he was twenty," explained Shear in perfectly audible confidence.

"Since then the city has made great strides, leaping full-grown, sir, in a single night," said Captain Stidger, hastily ascending the rostrum again with a mixed metaphor, to the apparent concern of a party of handsomely dressed young ladies who had recently entered the parlor. "Stretch-

ing from South Park to Black Point, and running back to the Mission Dolores and the Presidio, we are building up a metropolis, sir, worthy to be placed beside the Golden Gate that opens to the broad Pacific and the shores of far Cathay! When the Pacific Railroad is built we shall be the natural terminus of the Pathway of Nations!"

Mr. Hathaway's face betrayed no consciousness that he had heard something like this eight years before, and that much of it had come true, as he again sympathetically responded. Neither was his attention attracted by a singular similarity which the attitude of the group of ladies on the other side of the parlor bore to that of his own party. They were clustered around one of their own number — a striking-looking girl — who was apparently receiving their mingled flatteries and caresses with a youthful yet critical sympathy, which, singularly enough, was not unlike his own. It was evident also that an odd sort of rivalry seemed to spring up between the two parties, and that, in proportion as Hathaway's admirers became more marked and ostentatious in their attentions, the supporters of the young girl were equally effusive and enthusiastic in their devotion. As usual in such cases, the real contest was between the partisans themselves; each successive demonstration on either side was provocative or retaliatory, and when they were apparently rendering homage to their idols they were really distracted by and listening to each other. At last, Hathaway's party being reinforced by fresh visitors, a tall brunette of the opposition remarked in a professedly confidential but perfectly audible tone: —

"Well, my dear, as I don't suppose you want to take part in a political caucus, perhaps we 'd better return to the Ladies' Boudoir, unless there 's a committee sitting there too."

"I know how valuable your time must be, as you are all business men," said Hathaway, turning to his party, in an

equally audible tone; "but before you go, gentlemen, you must let me offer you a little refreshment in a private room," and he moved naturally towards the door. The rival fair, who had already risen at their commander's suggestion, here paused awkwardly over an embarrassing victory. Should they go or stay? The object of their devotion, however, turned curiously towards Hathaway. For an instant their eyes met. The young girl turned carelessly to her companions and said, "No; stay here — it's the public parlor;" and her followers, evidently accustomed to her authority, sat down again.

"A galaxy of young ladies from the Convent of Santa Clara, Mr. Hathaway," explained Captain Stidger, naïvely oblivious of any discourtesy on their part, as he followed Hathaway's glance and took his arm as they moved away. "Not the least of our treasures, sir. Most of them daughters of pioneers — and all Californian bred and educated. Connoisseurs have awarded them the palm, and declare that for Grace, Intelligence, and Woman's Highest Charms the East cannot furnish their equal!" Having delivered this Parthian compliment in an oratorical passage through the doorway, the captain descended, outside, into familiar speech. "But I suppose you will find that out for yourself if you stay here long. San Francisco might furnish a fitting bride to California's youngest senator."

"I am afraid that my stay here must be brief, and limited to business," said Hathaway, who had merely noticed that the principal girl was handsome and original looking. "In fact, I am here partly to see an old acquaintance — Colonel Pendleton."

The three men looked at each other curiously. "Oh! Harry Pendleton," said Mr. Hoskins incredulously. "You don't know *him?*"

"An old pioneer — of course," interposed Shear, explanatorily and apologetically. "Why, in Paul's time the colonel was a big man here."

"I understand the colonel has been unfortunate," said Hathaway gravely; "but in *my* time he was President of the El Dorado Bank."

"And the bank has n't got through its settlement yet," said Hoskins. "I hope *you* ain't expecting to get anything out of it?"

"No," said Hathaway, smiling; "I was a boy at that time, and lived up to my salary. I know nothing of his bank difficulties, but it always struck me that Colonel Pendleton was himself an honorable man."

"It ain't that," said Captain Stidger energetically, "but the trouble with Harry Pendleton is that he has n't grown with the State, and never adjusted himself to it. And he won't. He thinks the Millennium was between the fall of '49 and the spring of '50, and after that everything dropped. He belongs to the old days, when a man's simple *word* was good for any amount if you knew him; and they say that the old bank had n't a scrap of paper for half that was owing to it. That was all very well, sir, in '49 and '50, and — Luck; but it won't do for '59 and '60, and — Business! And the old man can't see it."

"But he is ready to fight for it now, as in the old time," said Mr. Slate, "and that 's another trouble with his chronology. He 's done more to keep up dueling than any other man in the State, and don't know the whole spirit of progress and civilization is against it."

It was impossible to tell from Paul Hathaway's face whether his sympathy with Colonel Pendleton's foibles or his assent to the criticisms of his visitors was the truer. Both were no doubt equally sincere. But the party was presently engaged in the absorption of refreshment, which, being of a purely spirituous and exhilarating quality, tended to increase their good humor with the host till they parted. Even then a gratuitous advertisement of his virtues and their own intentions in calling upon him was oratorically

voiced from available platforms and landings, in the halls and stairways, until it was pretty well known throughout the Golden Gate Hotel that the Hon. Mr. Paul Hathaway had arrived from Sacramento and had received a "spontaneous ovation."

Meantime the object of it had dropped into an easy-chair by the window of his room, and was endeavoring to recall a less profitable memory. The process of human forgetfulness is not a difficult one between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six, and Paul Hathaway had not only fulfilled the Mayor's request by forgetting the particulars of a certain transfer that he had witnessed in the Mayor's office, but in the year succeeding that request, being about to try his fortunes in the mountains, he had formally constituted Colonel Pendleton to act as his proxy in the administration of Mrs. Howard's singular Trust, in which, however, he had never participated except yearly to sign his name. He was, consequently, somewhat astonished to have received a letter a few days before from Colonel Pendleton, asking him to call and see him regarding it.

He vaguely remembered that it was eight years ago, and eight years had worked considerable change in the original trustees, greatest of all in his superior officer, the Mayor, who had died the year following, leaving his trusteeship to his successor in office, whom Paul Hathaway had never seen. The Bank of El Dorado, despite Mrs. Howard's sanguine belief, had long been in bankruptcy, and, although Colonel Pendleton still survived it, it was certain that no other president would succeed to his office as trustee, and that the function would lapse with him. Paul himself, a soldier of fortune, although habitually lucky, had only lately succeeded to a profession — if his political functions could be so described. Even with his luck, energy, and ambition, while everything was possible, nothing was secure. It seemed, therefore, as if the soulless official must

eventually assume the duties of the two sympathizing friends who had originated them, and had stood *in loco parentis* to the constructive orphan. The mother, Mrs. Howard, had disappeared a year after the Trust had been made — it was charitably presumed in order to prevent any complications that might arise from her presence in the country. With these facts before him, Paul Hathaway was more concerned in wondering what Pendleton could want with him than, I fear, any direct sympathy with the situation. On the contrary, it appeared to him more favorable for keeping the secret of Mrs. Howard's relationship, which would now die with Colonel Pendleton and himself; and there was no danger of any emotional betrayal of it in the cold official administration of a man who had received the Trust through the formal hands of successive predecessors. He had forgotten the time limited for the guardianship, but the girl must soon be of age and off their hands. If there had ever been any romantic or chivalrous impression left upon his memory by the scene in the Mayor's office, I fear he had put it away with various other foolish illusions of his youth, to which he now believed he was superior.

Nevertheless, he would see the colonel, and at once settle the question. He looked at the address, "St. Charles Hotel." He remembered an old hostelry of that name, near the Plaza. Could it be possible that it had survived the alterations and improvements of the city? It was an easy walk through remembered streets, yet with changed shops and houses and faces. When he reached the Plaza, scarce recognizable in its later frontages of brick and stone, he found the old wooden building still intact, with its villa-like galleries and verandas incongruously and ostentatiously overlooked by two new and aspiring erections on either side. For an instant he tried to recall the glamour of old days. He remembered when his boyish eyes regarded it as the crowning work of opulence and distinction; he remem-

bered a ball given there on some public occasion, which was to him the acme of social brilliancy and display. How tawdry and trivial it looked beside those later and more solid structures! How inconsistent were those long latticed verandas and balconies, pathetic record of that first illusion of the pioneers that their climate was a tropical one! A restaurant and billiard saloon had aggrandized all of the lower story; but there was still the fanlight, over which the remembered title of "St. Charles," in gilded letters, was now reinforced by the too demonstrative legend, "Apartments and Board, by the Day or Week." Was it possible that this narrow, creaking staircase had once seemed to him the broad steps of Fame and Fortune? On the first landing, a preoccupied Irish servant-girl, with a mop, directed him to a door at the end of the passage, at which he knocked. The door was opened by a grizzled negro servant, who was still holding a piece of oily chamois leather in his hand; and the contents of a dueling-case, scattered upon a table in the centre of the room, showed what had been his occupation. Admitting Hathaway with great courtesy, he said: —

"Marse Harry bin havin' his ole trubble, sah, and bin engaged just dis momen' on his toylet; ef yo' 'll accommodate yo'self on the sofa, I inform him yo' is heah."

As the negro passed into the next room, Paul cast a hasty glance around the apartment. The furniture, originally rich and elegant, was now worn threadbare and lustreless. A bookcase, containing, among other volumes, a few law books — there being a vague tradition, as Paul remembered, that Colonel Pendleton had once been connected with the law — a few French chairs of tarnished gilt, a rifle in the corner, a presentation sword in a mahogany case, a few classical prints on the walls, and one or two iron deed-boxes marked "El Dorado Bank," were the principal objects. A mild flavor of dry decay and methylated spirits pervaded

the apartment. Yet it was scrupulously clean and well kept, and a few clothes neatly brushed and folded on a chair bore witness to the servant's care. As Paul, however, glanced behind the sofa, he was concerned to see a coat, which had evidently been thrust hurriedly in a corner, with the sleeve lining inside out, and a needle and thread still sticking in the seam. It struck him instantly that this had been the negro's occupation, and that the pistol-cleaning was a polite fiction.

"Yo' 'll have to skuse Marse Harry seein' yo' in bed, but his laig 's pow'ful bad to-day, and he can't stand," said the servant, reëntering the room. "Skuse me, sah," he added in a dignified confidential whisper, half closing the door with his hand, "but if yo' would n't mind avoidin' 'xcitin' or controversical topics in yo' conversation, it would be de better fo' him."

Paul smilingly assented, and the black retainer, with even more than the usual solemn ceremonious exaggeration of his race, ushered him into the bedroom. It was furnished in the same faded glory as the sitting-room, with the exception of a low, iron camp-bedstead, in which the tall, soldierly figure of Colonel Pendleton, clad in threadbare silk dressing-gown, was stretched. He had changed in eight years: his hair had become gray, and was thinned over the sunken temples, but his iron-gray mustache was still particularly long and well pointed. His face bore marks of illness and care; there were deep lines down the angle of the nostril that spoke of alternate savage outbreak and repression, and gave his smile a sardonic rigidity. His dark eyes, that shone with the exaltation of fever, fixed Paul's on entering, and with the tyranny of an invalid never left them.

"Well, Hathaway?"

With the sound of that voice Paul felt the years slip away, and he was again a boy, looking up admiringly to

the strong man, who now lay helpless before him. He had entered the room with a faint sense of sympathizing superiority and a consciousness of having had experience in controlling men. But all this fled before Colonel Pendleton's authoritative voice; even its broken tones carried the old dominant spirit of the man, and Paul found himself admiring a quality in his old acquaintance that he missed in his newer friends.

"I haven't seen you for eight years, Hathaway. Come here and let me look at you."

Paul approached the bedside with boyish obedience. Pendleton took his hand and gazed at him critically.

"I should have recognized you, sir, for all your mustache and your inches. The last time I saw you was in Jack Hammersley's office. Well, Jack 's dead, and here I am, little better, I reckon. You remember Hammersley's house?"

"Yes," said Paul, albeit wondering at the question.

"Something like this, Swiss villa style. I remember when Jack put it up. Well, the last time I was out, I passed there. And what do you think they 've done to it?"

Paul could not imagine.

"Well, sir," said the colonel gravely, "they 've changed it into a church missionary shop and young men's Christian reading-room! But that's 'progress' and 'improvement'!" He paused, and, slowly withdrawing his hand from Paul's, added, with grim apology, "You 're young, and belong to the new school, perhaps. Well, sir, I've read your speech; I don't belong to your party — mine died ten years ago — but I congratulate you. George! Confound it! where 's that boy gone?"

The negro indicated by this youthful title, although he must have been ten years older than his master, after a hurried shuffling in the sitting-room eventually appeared at the door.

"George, champagne and materials for cocktails for the gentleman. The *best*, you understand. No new-fangled notions from that new barkeeper."

Paul, who thought he observed a troubled blinking in George's eyelid, and referred it to a fear of possible excitement for his patient, here begged his host not to trouble himself — that he seldom took anything in the morning.

"Possibly not, sir; possibly not," returned the colonel hastily. "I know the new ideas are prohibitive, and some other blank thing, but you 're safe here from your constituents, and by gad, sir, I sha'n't force you to take it! It 's *my* custom, Hathaway — an old one — played out, perhaps, like all the others, but a custom nevertheless, and I 'm only surprised that George, who knows it, should have forgotten it."

"Fack is, Marse Harry," said George, with feverish apology, "it bin gone 'scaped my mind dis mo'nin' in de prerogation ob business, but I 'm goin' now, shuah!" and he disappeared.

"A good boy, sir, but beginning to be contaminated. Brought him here from Nashville over ten years ago. Eight years ago they proved to him that he was no longer a slave, and made him d—d unhappy until I promised him it should make no difference to him and he could stay. I had to send for his wife and child, — of course, a dead loss of eighteen hundred dollars when they set foot in the State, — but I 'm blanked if he is n't just as miserable with them here, for he has to take two hours in the morning and three in the afternoon every day to be with 'em. I tried to get him to take his family to the mines and make his fortune, like those fellows they call bankers and operators and stock-brokers nowadays; or to go to Oregon where they 'll make him some kind of a mayor or sheriff — but he won't. He collects my rents on some little property I have left, and pays my bills, sir, and, if this blank civilization would only leave him alone, he 'd be a good enough boy."

Paul could n't help thinking that the rents George collected were somewhat inconsistent with those he was evidently mending when he arrived, but at that moment the jingle of glasses was heard in the sitting-room, and the old negro reappeared at the door. Drawing himself up with ceremonious courtesy, he addressed Paul. "Wo'd yo' mind, sah, taking a glance at de wine for yo' choice?" Paul rose, and followed him into the sitting-room, when George carefully closed the door. To his surprise Hathaway beheld a tray with two glasses of whiskey and bitters, but no wine. "Skuse me, sah," said the old man, with dignified apology, "but de kernel won't have any but de best champagne for hono'ble gemmen like yo'self, and I 'se despaired to say it can't be got in de house or de suburbs. De best champagne dat we gives visitors is de Widder Glencoe. Wo'd yo' mind, sah, for de sake o' not 'xcitin' de kernel wid triflin' culinary matter, to say dat yo' don' take but de one brand?"

"Certainly," said Paul, smiling. "I really don't care for anything so early;" then, returning to the bedroom, he said carelessly, "You 'll excuse me taking the liberty, colonel, of sending away the champagne and contenting myself with whiskey. Even the best brand — the Widow Cliquot" — with a glance at the gratified George — "I find rather trying so early in the morning."

"As you please, Hathaway," said the colonel, somewhat stiffly. "I dare say there 's a new fashion in drinks now, and a gentleman's stomach is a thing of the past. Then, I suppose, we can spare the boy, as this is his time for going home. Put that tin box with the Trust papers on the bed, George, and Mr. Hathaway will excuse your waiting." As the old servant made an exaggerated obeisance to each, Paul remarked, as the door closed upon him, "George certainly keeps his style, colonel, in the face of the progress you deplore."

"He was always a 'dandy nigger,'" returned Pendleton, his face slightly relaxing as he glanced after his grizzled henchman, "but his exaggeration of courtesy is a blank sight more natural and manly than the exaggeration of discourtesy which your superior civilized 'helps' think is self-respect. The excuse of servitude of any kind is its spontaneity and affection. When you know a man hates you and serves you from interest, you know he 's a cur and you 're a tyrant. It 's your blank progress that 's made menial service degrading by teaching men to avoid it. Why, sir, when I first arrived here, Jack Hammersley and myself took turns as cook to the party. I did n't consider myself any the worse master for it. But enough of this." He paused, and, raising himself on his elbow, gazed for some seconds half cautiously, half doubtfully, upon his companion. "I 've got something to tell you, Hathaway," he said slowly. "You 've had an easy time with this Trust; your share of the work has n't worried you, kept you awake nights, or interfered with your career. I understand perfectly," he continued, in reply to Hathaway's deprecating gesture. "I accepted to act as your proxy, and I *have*. I 'm not complaining. But it is time that you should know what I 've done, and what you may still have to do. Here is the record. On the day after that interview in the Mayor's office, the El Dorado Bank, of which I was, and still am, President, received seventy-five thousand dollars in trust from Mrs. Howard. Two years afterwards, on that same day, the bank had, by lucky speculations, increased that sum to the credit of the Trust one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, or double the original capital. In the following year the bank suspended payment."

CHAPTER II

In an instant the whole situation and his relations to it flashed upon Paul with a terrible, but almost grotesque completeness. Here he was, at the outset of his career, responsible for the wasted fortune of the daughter of a social outcast, and saddled with her support! He now knew why Colonel Pendleton had wished to see him; for one shameful moment he believed he also knew why he had been content to take his proxy! The questionable character of the whole transaction, his own carelessness, which sprang from that very confidence and trust that Pendleton had lately extolled — what *would*, what *could* not be made of it! He already heard himself abused by his opponents — perhaps, more terrible still, faintly excused by his friends. All this was visible in his pale face and flashing eyes as he turned them on the helpless invalid.

Colonel Pendleton received his look with the same critical, half-curious scrutiny that had accompanied his speech. At last his face changed slightly, a faint look of disappointment crossed his eyes, and a sardonic smile deepened the lines of his mouth.

"There, sir," he said hurriedly, as if dismissing an unpleasant revelation; "don't alarm yourself! Take a drink of that whiskey. You look pale. Well; turn your eyes on those walls. You don't see any of that money laid out here — do you? Look at me. I don't look like a man enriched with other people's money — do I? Well, let that content you. Every dollar of that Trust fund, Hathaway, with all the interests and profits that have accrued to

it, is *safe!* Every cent of it is locked up in government bonds with the Rothschilds' agent. There are the receipts, dated a week before the bank suspended. But enough of *that* — *that* is n't what I asked you to come and see me for."

The blood had rushed back to Paul's cheeks uncomfortably. He saw now, as impulsively as he had previously suspected his co-trustee, that the man had probably ruined himself to save the Trust. He stammered that he had not questioned the management of the fund nor asked to withdraw his proxy.

"No matter, sir," said the colonel impatiently; "you had the right, and I suppose," he added, with half-concealed scorn, "it was your duty. But let that pass. The money is safe enough; but, Mr. Hathaway, — and this is the point I want to discuss with you, — it begins to look as if the *secret* was safe no longer!" He had raised himself with some pain and difficulty to draw nearer to Paul, and had again fixed his eyes eagerly upon him. But Paul's responsive glance was so vague that he added quickly, "You understand, sir; I believe that there are hounds — I say hounds! — who would be able to blurt out at any moment that that girl at Santa Clara is Kate Howard's daughter."

At any other moment Paul might have questioned the gravity of any such contingency, but the terrible earnestness of the speaker, his dominant tone, and a certain respect which had lately sprung up in his breast for him, checked him, and he only asked with as much concern as he could master for the moment: —

"What makes you think so?"

"That 's what I want to tell you, Hathaway, and how I, and I alone, am responsible for it. When the bank was in difficulty and I made up my mind to guard the Trust with my own personal and private capital, I knew that there

might be some comment on my action. It was a delicate matter to show any preference or exclusion at such a moment, and I took two or three of my brother directors whom I thought I could trust into my confidence. I told them the whole story, and how the Trust was sacred. I made a mistake, sir," continued Pendleton sardonically, "a grave mistake. I did not take into account that even in three years civilization and religion had gained ground here. There was a hound there — a blank Judas in the Trust. Well; he did n't see it. I think he talked Scripture and morality. He said something about the wages of sin being infamous, and only worthy of confiscation. He talked about the sins of the father being visited upon the children, and justly. I stopped him. Well! Do you know what 's the matter with my ankle? Look!" He stopped, and with some difficulty and invincible gravity, throwing aside his dressing-gown, turned down his stocking, and exposed to Paul's gaze the healed cicatrix of an old bullet-wound. "Troubled me damnably near a year. Where I hit *him* — has n't troubled him at all since!

"I think," continued the colonel, falling back upon the pillow with an air of relief, "that he told others — of his own kidney, sir, — though it was a secret among gentlemen. But they have preferred to be silent now — than *afterwards.* They know that I 'm ready. But I can't keep this up long; some time, you know, they 're bound to improve in practice and hit higher up! As far as I 'm concerned," he added, with a grim glance around the faded walls and threadbare furniture, "it don't mind; but mine is n't the mouth to be stopped." He paused, and then abruptly, yet with a sudden and pathetic dropping of his dominant note, said: "Hathaway, you 're young, and Hammersley liked you — what 's to be done? I thought of passing over my tools to you. You can shoot, and I hear you *have.* But the h—l of it is that if you dropped a man or two people

would ask *why*, and want to know what it was about; while, when I do, nobody here thinks it anything but *my way!* I don't mean that it would hurt you with the crowd to wipe out one or two of these hounds during the canvass, but the trouble is that they belong to *your party*, and," he added grimly, "that would n't help your career."

"But," said Paul, ignoring the sarcasm, "are you not magnifying the effect of a disclosure? The girl is an heiress, excellently brought up. Who will bother about the antecedents of the mother, who has disappeared, whom she never knew, and who is legally dead to her?"

"In my day, sir, no one who knew the circumstances," returned the colonel quickly. "But we are living in the blessed era of Christian retribution and civilized propriety, and I believe there are a lot of men and women about who have no other way of showing their own virtue than by showing up another's vice. We're in a reaction of reform. It's the old drunkards who are always more clamorous for total abstinence than the moderately temperate. I tell you, Hathaway, there could n't be an unluckier moment for our secret coming out."

"But she will be of age soon."

"In two months."

"And sure to marry."

"Marry!" repeated Pendleton, with grim irony. "Would *you* marry her?"

"That's another question," said the young man promptly, "and one of individual taste; but it does not affect my general belief that she could easily find a husband as good and better."

"Suppose she found one *before* the secret is out. Ought he be told?"

"Certainly."

"And that would imply telling *her?*"

"Yes," said Paul, but not so promptly.

"And you consider *that* fulfilling the promise of the Trust — the pledges exchanged with that woman?" continued Pendleton, with glittering eyes and a return to his own dominant tone.

"My dear colonel," said Paul, somewhat less positively, but still smiling, "you have made a romantic, almost impossible compact with Mrs. Howard that, you yourself are now obliged to admit, circumstances may prevent your carrying out substantially. You forget, also, that you have just told me that you have already broken your pledge — under circumstances, it is true, that do you honor — and that now your desperate attempts to retrieve it have failed. Now, I really see nothing wrong in your telling to a presumptive well-wisher of the girl what you have told to her enemy."

There was a dead silence. The prostrate man uttered a slight groan, as if in pain, and drew up his leg to change his position. After a pause, he said in a restrained voice, "I differ from you, Mr. Hathaway; but enough of this for the present. I have something else to say. It will be necessary for one of us to go at once to Santa Clara and see Miss Yerba Buena."

"Good heavens!" said Paul quickly. "Do you call her *that?*"

"Certainly, sir. *You* gave her the name. Have you forgotten?"

"I only suggested it," returned Paul hopelessly; "but no matter — go on."

"*I* cannot go there, as you see," continued Pendleton, with a weary gesture towards his crippled ankle; "and I should particularly like you to see her before we make the joint disposition of her affairs with the Mayor, two months hence. I have some papers you can show her, and I have already written a letter introducing you to the Lady Superior at the convent, and to her. You have never seen her?"

"No," said Paul. "But of course you have?"

"Not for three years."

Paul's eyes evidently expressed some wonder, for a moment after the colonel added, "I believe, Hathaway, I am looked upon as a queer survival of a rather lawless and improper past. At least, I have thought it better not socially to compromise her by my presence. The Mayor goes there — at the examinations and exercises, I believe, sir; they make a sort of reception for him — with a — a — banquet — lemonade and speeches."

"I had intended to leave for Sacramento to-morrow night," said Paul, glancing curiously at the helpless man; "but I will go there if you wish."

"Thank you. It will be better."

There were a few words of further explanation of the papers, and Pendleton placed the packet in his visitor's hands. Paul rose. Somehow, it appeared to him that the room looked more faded and forgotten than when he entered it, and the figure of the man before him more lonely, helpless, and abandoned. With one of his sympathetic impulses he said: —

"I don't like to leave you here alone. Are you sure you can help yourself without George? Can I do anything before I go?"

"I am quite accustomed to it," said Pendleton quietly. "It happens once or twice a year, and when I go out — well — I miss more than I do here."

He took Paul's proffered hand mechanically, with a slight return of the critical, doubting look he had cast upon him when he entered. His voice, too, had quite recovered its old dominance, as he said, with half-patronizing conventionality, "You 'll have to find your way out alone. Let me know how you have sped at Santa Clara, will you? Goodby."

The staircase and passage seemed to have grown shabbier

and meaner as Paul, slowly and hesitatingly, descended to the street. At the foot of the stairs he paused irresolutely, and loitered with a vague idea of turning back on some pretense, only that he might relieve himself of the sense of desertion. He had already determined upon making that inquiry into the colonel's personal and pecuniary affairs which he had not dared to offer personally, and had a half-formed plan of testing his own power and popularity in a certain line of relief that at once satisfied his sympathies and ambitions. Nevertheless, after reaching the street, he lingered a moment, when an odd idea of temporizing with his inclinations struck him. At the farther end of the hotel — one of the parasites living on its decayed fortunes — was a small barber-shop. By having his hair trimmed and his clothes brushed he could linger a little longer beneath the same roof with the helpless solitary, and perhaps come to some conclusion. He entered the clean but scantily furnished shop, and threw himself into one of the nearest chairs, hardly noting that there were no other customers, and that a single assistant, stropping a razor behind a glass door, was the only occupant. But there was a familiar note of exaggerated politeness about the voice of this man as he opened the door and came towards the back of the chair with the formula: —

"Mo'nin', sah! Shall we hab de pleshure of shavin' or hah-cuttin' dis mo'nin'?" Paul raised his eyes quickly to the mirror before him. It reflected the black face and grizzled hair of George.

More relieved at finding the old servant still near his master than caring to comprehend the reason, Hathaway said pleasantly, "Well, George, is this the way you look after your family?"

The old man started; for an instant his full red lips seemed to become dry and ashen, the whites of his eyes were suffused and staring, as he met Paul's smiling face in

the glass. But almost as quickly he recovered himself, and, with a polite but deprecating bow, said, — "For God sake, sah! I admit de sarkumstances is agin me, but de simple fack is dat I 'm temper'ly occupyin' de place of an ole frien', sah, who is called round de cornah."

"And I 'm devilish glad of any fact, George, that gives me a chance of having my hair cut by Colonel Pendleton's right-hand man. So fire away!"

The gratified smile which now suddenly overspread the whole of the old man's face, and seemed to quickly stiffen the rugged and wrinkled fingers that had at first trembled in drawing a pair of shears from a ragged pocket, appeared to satisfy Paul's curiosity for the present. But after a few moments' silent snipping, during which he could detect in the mirror some traces of agitation still twitching the negro's face, he said, with an air of conviction : —

"Look here, George — why don't you regularly use your leisure moments in this trade? You 'd make your fortune by your taste and skill at it."

For the next half minute the old man's frame shook with silent childlike laughter behind Paul's chair. "Well, Marse Hathaway, yo' 's an ole frien' o' my massa, and a gemman yo'self, sah, and a senetah, and I do'an mind tellin' yo' — dat 's jess what I bin gone done! It makes a little ready money for de ole woman and de chilleren. But de kernel don' kno'. Ah, sah! de kernel kill me or hisself if he so much as 'spicioned me. De kernel is high-toned, sah! — bein' a gemman yo'self, yo' understand. He would n't heah ob his niggah worken' for two massas — for all he 's willen' to lemme go and help myse'f. But, Lord bless yo', sah, dat ain't in de category! De kernel could n't get along widout me."

"You collect his rents, don't you?" said Paul quietly.

"Yes, sah."

"Much?"

"Well, no, sah; not so much as fom'ly, sah! Yo' see, de kernel's prop'ty lies in de ole parts ob de town, where de po' white folks lib, and dey ain't reg'lar. De kernel dat sof' in his heart, he dare n' press 'em; some of 'em is ole fo'ty-niners, like hisself, sah; and some is Spanish, sah, and dey is sof' too, and ain't no more gumption dan chilleren, and tink it 's ole time come agin, and dey 's in de ole places like afo' de Mexican wah! and dey don' bin payin' noffin'. But we gets along, sah, — we gets along, — not in de *prima facie* style, sah! mebbe not in de modden way dut de kernel don't like; but we keeps ourse'f, sah, and has wine fo' our friends. When yo' come again, sah, yo' 'll find de Widder Glencoe on de sideboard."

"Has the colonel many friends here?"

"Mos' de ole ones bin don gone, sah, and de kernel don' cotton to de new. He don' mix much in sassiety till de bank settlements bin gone done. Skuse me, sah! — but you don' happen to know when dat is? It would be a pow'ful heap off de kernel's mind if it was done. Bein' a high and mighty man in committees up dah in Sacramento, sah, I did n't know but what yo' might know as it might come befo' yo'."

"I 'll see about it," said Paul, with an odd, abstracted smile.

"Shampoo dis mornen', sah?"

"Nothing more in this line," said Paul, rising from his chair, "but something more, perhaps, in the line of your other duties. You 're a good barber for the public, George, and I don't take back what I said about your future; but *just now* I think the colonel wants all your service. He 's not at all well. Take this," he said, putting a twenty-dollar gold piece in the astonished servant's hand, "and for the next three or four days drop the shop, and under some pretext or another arrange to be with him. That money will cover what you lose here, and as soon as the colonel 's

all right again you can come back to work. But are you not afraid of being recognized by some one?"

"No, sah, dat 's just it. On'y strangers dat don't know no better come yere."

"But suppose your master should drop in? It 's quite convenient to his rooms."

"Marse Harry in a barber-shop!" said the old man, with a silent laugh. "Skuse me, sah," he added, with an apologetic mixture of respect and dignity, "but fo' twenty years no man hez touched de kernel's chin but myself. When Marse Harry hez to go to a barber-shop, it won't make no matter who 's dar."

"Let 's hope he will not," said Paul gayly; then, anxious to evade the gratitude which, since his munificence, he had seen beaming in the old negro's eye and evidently trying to find polysyllabic and elevated expression on his lips, he said hurriedly, "I shall expect to find you with the colonel when I call again in a day or two," and smilingly departed.

At the end of two hours George's barber-employer returned to relieve his assistant, and, on receiving from him an account and a certain percentage of the afternoon's fees (minus the gift from Paul), was informed by George that he should pretermit his attendance for a few days. "Udder private and personal affairs," explained the old negro, who made no social distinction in his vocabulary, "peroccupyin' dis niggah's time." The head barber, unwilling to lose a really good assistant, endeavored to dissuade him by the offer of increased emolument, but George was firm.

As he entered the sitting-room the colonel detected his step, and called him in.

"Another time, George, never allow a guest of mine to send away wine. If he don't care for it, put it on the sideboard."

"Yes, sah; but as yo' did n't like it yo'self, Marse Harry, and de wine was de most 'xpensive quality ob Glencoe" —

"D—n the expense!" He paused, and gazed searchingly at his old retainer.

"George," he said suddenly, yet in a gentle voice, "don't lie to me, or" — in a still kinder voice — "I'll flog the black skin off you! Listen to me. *Have* you got any money left?"

"'Deed, sah, dere *is*," said the negro earnestly. "I'll jist fetch it wid de accounts."

"Hold on! I've been thinking, lying here, that if the Widow Molloy can't pay because she sold out, and that tobacconist is ruined, and we've had to pay the water-tax for old Bill Soames, the rent last week don't amount to much, while there's the month's bill for the restaurant and that blank druggist's account for lotions and medicines to come out of it. It strikes me we're pretty near touching bottom. I've everything I want here, but, by God, sir, if I find *you* skimping yourself or lying to me or borrowing money" —

"Yes, Marse Harry, but the Widder Molloy done gone and paid up dis afernoon. I'll bring de books and money to prove it;" and he hurriedly reëntered the sitting-room.

Then with trembling hands he emptied his pockets on the table, including Paul's gift and the fees he had just received, and opening a desk-drawer took from it a striped cotton handkerchief, such as negro women wear on their heads, containing a small quantity of silver tied up in a hard knot, and a boy's purse. This he emptied on the table with his own money.

They were the only rents of Colonel Henry Pendleton! They were contributed by "George Washington Thomson;" his wife, otherwise known as "Aunt Dinah," washerwoman; and "Scipio Thomson," their son, aged fourteen, bootblack. It did not amount to much. But in that happy moisture that dimmed the old man's eyes, God knows it looked large enough.

CHAPTER III

Although the rays of an unclouded sun were hot in the Santa Clara roads and byways, and the dry, bleached dust had become an impalpable powder, the perspiring and parched pedestrian who rashly sought relief in the shade of the wayside oak was speedily chilled to the bone by the northwest trade-winds that on those August afternoons swept through the defiles of the Coast Range, and even penetrated the pastoral valley of San José. The anomaly of straw hats and overcoats with the occupants of buggies and station wagons was thus accounted for, and even in the sheltered garden of "El Rosario" two young girls in light summer dresses had thrown wraps over their shoulders as they lounged down a broad rose-alley at right angles with the deep, long veranda of the casa. Yet, in spite of the chill, the old Spanish house and gardens presented a luxurious, almost tropical, picture from the roadside. Banks, beds, and bowers of roses lent their name and color to the grounds; treelike clusters of hanging fuchsias, moundlike masses of variegated verbena, and tangled thickets of ceanothus and spreading heliotrope were set in boundaries of venerable olive, fig, and pear trees. The old house itself, a picturesque relief to the glaring newness of the painted villas along the road, had been tastefully modified to suit the needs and habits of a later civilization; the galleries of the inner courtyard, or patio, had been transferred to the outside walls in the form of deep verandas, while the old adobe walls themselves were hidden beneath flowing Cape jessamine or bestarred passion-vines, and topped by roofs of cylindrical red tiles.

"Miss Yerba!" said a dry, masculine voice from the veranda.

The taller young girl started, and drew herself suddenly behind a large Castilian rose-tree, dragging her companion with her, and putting her finger imperatively upon a pretty but somewhat passionate mouth. The other girl checked a laugh, and remained watching her friend's wickedly leveled brows in amused surprise.

The call was repeated from the veranda. After a moment's pause there was the sound of retreating footsteps, and all was quiet again.

"Why, for goodness' sake, did n't you answer, Yerba?" asked the shorter girl.

"Oh, I hate him!" responded Yerba. "He only wanted to bore me with his stupid, formal, sham-parental talk. Because he 's my official guardian he thinks it necessary to assume this manner towards me when we meet, and treats me as if I were something between his stepdaughter and an almshouse orphan or a police board. It 's perfectly ridiculous, for it 's only put on while he is in office, and he knows it, and I know it, and I 'm tired of making believe. Why, my dear, they change every election; I 've had seven of them, all more or less of this kind, since I can remember."

"But I thought there were two others, dear, that were not official," said her companion coaxingly.

Yerba sighed. "No; there was another, who was president of a bank, but that was also to be official if he died. I used to like him — he seemed to be the only gentleman among them; but it appears that he is dreadfully improper; shoots people now and then for nothing at all, and burst up his bank, — and, of course, he 's impossible, and, as there 's no more bank, when he dies there 'll be no more trustee."

"And there 's the third, you know — a stranger, who never appears?" suggested the younger girl.

"And who do you suppose *he* turns out to be? Do you remember that conceited little wretch — that 'Baby Senator,' I think they called him — who was in the parlor of the Golden Gate the other morning surrounded by his idiotic worshipers and toadies and ballot-box stuffers? Well, if you please, *that's* Mr. Paul Hathaway — the Honorable Paul Hathaway, who washed his hands of me, my dear, at the beginning!"

"But really, Yerba, I thought that he looked and acted" —

"You thought of nothing at all, Milly," returned Yerba, with authority. "I tell you, he's a mass of conceit. What else can you expect of a Man — toadied and fawned upon to that extent? It made me sick! I could have just shaken them!"

As if to emphasize her statement, she grasped one of the long willowy branches of the enormous rose-bush where she stood, and shook it lightly. The action detached a few of the maturer blossoms, and sent down a shower of faded pink petals on her dark hair and yellow dress. "I can't bear conceit," she added.

"Oh, Yerba, just stand as you are! I do wish the girls could see you. You make the *loveliest* picture!"

She certainly did look very pretty as she stood there — a few leaves lodged in her hair, clinging to her dress, and suggesting by reflection the color that her delicate satin skin would have resented in its own texture. But she turned impatiently away — perhaps not before she had allowed this passing vision to impress the mind of her devoted adherent — and said, "Come along, or that dreadful man will be out on the veranda again."

"But, if you dislike him so, why did you accept the invitation to meet him here at luncheon?" said the curious Milly.

"*I* did n't accept; the Mother Superior did for me,

because he 's the Mayor of San Francisco visiting your uncle, and she 's always anxious to placate the powers that be. And I thought he might have some information that I could get out of him. And it was better than being in the convent all day. And I thought I could stand *him* if you were here."

Milly gratefully accepted this doubtful proof of affection by squeezing her companion's arm. "And you did n't get any information, dear?"

"Of course not! The idiot knows only the old tradition of his office — that I was a mysterious Trust left in Mayor Hammersley's hands. He actually informed me that 'Buena' meant 'Good'; that it was likely the name of the captain of some whaler, that put into San Francisco in the early days, whose child I was, and that, if I choose to call myself 'Miss Good,' he would allow it, and get a bill passed in the Legislature to legalize it. Think of it, my dear! 'Miss Good,' like one of Mrs. Barbauld's stories, or a moral governess in the 'Primary Reader.'"

"'Miss Good,' repeated Milly innocently. "Yes, you might put an *e* at the end — G-double-o-d-e. There are Goodes in Philadelphia. And then you won't have to sacrifice that sweet pretty 'Yerba,' that 's so stylish and musical, for you 'd still be 'Yerba Good.' But," she added, as Yerba made an impatient gesture, "why do you worry yourself about *that?* You would n't keep your own name long, whatever it was. An heiress like you, dear, — lovely and accomplished, — would have the best names as well as the best men in America to choose from."

"Now please don't repeat that idiot's words. That 's what *he* says; that 's what they *all* say!" returned Yerba pettishly. "One would really think it was necessary for me to get married to become anybody at all, or have any standing whatever. And, whatever you do, don't go talking of me as if I were named after a vegetable. 'Yerba

Buena' is the name of an island in the bay just off San Francisco. I 'm named after that."

"But I don't see the difference, dear. The island was named after the vine that grows on it."

"*You* don't see the difference?" said Yerba darkly. "Well, *I* do. But what are you looking at?"

Her companion had caught her arm, and was gazing intently at the house.

"Yerba," she said quickly, "there 's the Mayor and uncle, and a strange gentleman coming down the walk. They 're looking for us. And, as I live, Yerb! the strange gentleman is that young senator, Mr. Hathaway!"

"Mr. Hathaway? Nonsense!"

"Look for yourself."

Yerba glanced at the three gentlemen, who, a hundred yards distant, were slowly advancing in the direction of the ceanothus hedge, behind which the girls had instinctively strayed during their conversation.

"What are you going to do?" said Milly eagerly. "They 're coming straight this way. Shall we stay here and let them pass, or make a run for the house?"

"No," said Yerba, to Milly's great surprise. "That would look as if we cared. Besides, I don't know that Mr. Hathaway has come to see *me*. We 'll stroll out and meet them accidentally."

Milly was still more astonished. However, she said, "Wait a moment, dear!" and, with the instinctive deftness of her sex, in three small tugs and a gentle hitch, shook Yerba's gown into perfect folds, passed her fingers across her forehead and over her ears, securing, however, with a hairpin on their passage three of the rose petals where they had fallen. Then, discharging their faces of any previous expression, these two charming hypocrites sallied out innocently into the walk. Nothing could be more natural than their manner: if a criticism might be ventured

upon, it was that their elbows were slightly drawn inwards and before them, leaving their hands gracefully advanced in the line of their figures, an attitude accepted throughout the civilized world of deportment as indicating fastidious refinement not unmingled with permissible hauteur.

The three gentlemen lifted their hats at this ravishing apparition, and halted. The Mayor advanced with great politeness.

"I feared you did n't hear me call you, Miss Yerba, so we ventured to seek you." As the two girls exchanged almost infantile glances of surprise, he continued: "Mr. Paul Hathaway has done us the honor of seeking you here, as he did not find you at the convent. You may have forgotten that Mr. Hathaway is the third one of your trustees."

"And so inefficient and worthless that I fear he does n't count," said Paul; "but," raising his eyes to Yerba's, "I fancy that I have already had the pleasure of seeing you, and, I fear, the mortification of having disturbed you and your friends in the parlor of the Golden Gate Hotel yesterday."

The two girls looked at each other with the same childlike surprise. Yerba broke the silence by suddenly turning to Milly. "Certainly, you remember how greatly interested we were in the conversation of a party of gentlemen who were there when we came in. I am afraid our foolish prattle must have disturbed *you*. I know that we were struck with the intelligent and eloquent devotion of your friends."

"Oh, perfectly," chimed in the loyal but somewhat infelix Milly; "and it was so kind and thoughtful of Mr. Hathaway to take them away as he did."

"I felt the more embarrassed," continued Hathaway, smiling, but still critically examining Yerba for an indication of something characteristic beyond this palpable conven-

tionality, "as I unfortunately must present my credentials from a gentleman as much of a stranger as myself — Colonel Pendleton."

The trade-wind was evidently making itself felt even in this pastoral retreat, for the two gentlemen appeared to shrink slightly within themselves, and a chill seemed to have passed over the group. The Mayor coughed. The avuncular Woods gazed abstractedly at a large cactus. Even Paul, prepared by previous experience, stopped short.

"Colonel Pendleton! Oh, do tell me all about him!" flashed out Yerba suddenly, with clasped hands and eager girlish breath.

Paul cast a quick grateful glance at the girl. Whether assumed or not, her enthusiastic outburst was effective. The Mayor looked uneasily at Woods, and turned to Paul.

"Ah, yes! You and he are original co-trustees. I believe Pendleton is in reduced circumstances. Never quite got over that bank trouble."

"That is only a question of legislative investigation and relief," said Paul lightly, yet with purposely vague official mystery of manner. Then, turning quickly to Yerba, as if replying to the only real question at issue, he continued pointedly, "I am sorry to say the colonel's health is so poor that it keeps him quite a recluse. I have a letter from him and a message for you." His bright eyes added plainly — "as soon as we can get rid of those people."

"Then you think that a bill" — began the Mayor eagerly.

"I think, my dear sir," said Paul plaintively, "that I and my friends have already tried the patience of these two young ladies quite enough yesterday with politics and law-making. I have to catch the six-o'clock train to San Francisco this evening, and have already lost the time I hoped to spend with Miss Yerba by missing her at the convent. Let me stroll on here, if you like, and if I venture

to monopolize the attention of this young lady for half an hour, you, my dear Mr. Mayor, who have more frequent access to her, I know, will not begrudge it to me."

He placed himself beside Yerba and Milly, and began an entertaining, although, I fear, slightly exaggerated, account of his reception by the Lady Superior, and her evident doubts of his identity with the trustee mentioned in Pendleton's letter of introduction. "I confess she frightened me," he continued, "when she remarked that, according to my statement, I could have been only eighteen years old when I became your guardian, and as much in want of one as you were. I think that only her belief that Mr. Woods and the Mayor would detect me as an impostor provoked her at last to tell me your whereabouts."

"But why *did* they ever make you a trustee, for goodness' sake?" said Milly naïvely. "Was there no one grown up at that time that they could have called upon?"

"Those were the *early* days of California," responded Paul, with great gravity, although he was conscious that Yerba was regarding him narrowly, "and I probably looked older and more intelligent than I really was. For, candidly," with the consciousness of Yerba's eyes still upon him, "I remember very little about it. I dare say I was selected, as you kindly suggest, 'for goodness' sake.'"

"After all," said the volatile Milly, who seemed inclined, as chaperon, to direct the conversation, "there was something pretty and romantic about it. You two poor young things taking care of each other, for of course there were no women here in those days."

"Of course there *were* women here," interrupted Yerba quickly, with a half-meaning, half-interrogative glance at Paul that made him instinctively uneasy. "You later comers" — to Milly — "always seem to think that there was nothing here before you!" She paused, and then added, with a naïve mixture of reproach and coquetry that was as

charming as it was unexpected, "As to taking care of each other, Mr. Hathaway very quickly got rid of me, I believe."

"But I left you in better hands, Miss Yerba; and let me thank you now," he added in a lower tone, "for recognizing it as you did a moment ago. I 'm glad that you instinctively liked Colonel Pendleton. Had you known him better, you would have seen how truthful that instinct was. His chief fault in the eyes of our worthy friends is that he reminds them of a great deal they can't perpetuate and much they would like to forget." He checked himself abruptly. "But here is your letter," he resumed, drawing Colonel Pendleton's missive from his pocket, "perhaps you would like to read it now, in case you have any message to return by me. Miss Woods and I will excuse you."

They had reached the end of the rose-alley, where a summer-house that was in itself a rose-bower partly disclosed itself. The other gentlemen had lagged behind. "I will amuse *myself*, and console your other guardian, dear," said the vivacious Milly, with a rapid exchange of glances with Yerba, "until this horrid business is over. Besides," she added, with cheerful vagueness, "after so long a separation you must have a great deal to say to each other."

Paul smiled as she rustled away, and Yerba, entering the summer-house, sat down and opened the letter. The young man remained leaning against the rustic archway, occasionally glancing at her and at the moving figures in the gardens. He was conscious of an odd excitement which he could trace to no particular cause. It was true that he had been annoyed at not finding the young girl at the convent, and at having to justify himself to the Lady Superior for what he conceived to be an act of gratuitous kindness; nor was he blind to the fact that his persistence in following her was more an act of aggression against the enemies of Pendleton than of concern for Yerba. She was certainly pretty; he could not remember her mother suffi-

ciently to trace any likeness, and he had never admired the mother's pronounced beauty. She had flashed out for an instant into what seemed originality and feeling. But it had passed, and she had asked no further questions in regard to the colonel.

She had hurriedly skimmed through the letter, which seemed to be composed of certain figures and accounts. "I suppose it 's all right," she said; "at least you can say so if he asks you. It 's only an explanation why he has transferred my money from the bank to the Rothschilds' agent years ago. I don't see why it should interest me *now*."

Paul made no doubt that it was the same transfer that had shipwrecked the colonel's fortune and alienated his friends, and could not help replying somewhat pointedly, "But I think it should, Miss Yerba. I don't know what the colonel explained to you — doubtless, not the whole truth, for he is not a man to praise himself; but, the fact is, the bank was in difficulties at the time of that transfer, and, to make it, he sacrificed his personal fortune, and, I think, awakened some of that ill feeling you have just noticed." He checked himself too late: he had again lost not only his tact and self-control, but had nearly betrayed himself. He was surprised that the girl's justifiable ignorance should have irritated him. Yet she had evidently not noticed, or misunderstood it, for she said, with a certain precision that was almost studied: —

"Yes, I suppose it would have been a terrible thing to him to have been suspected of misappropriating a Trust confided to him by parties who had already paid him the high compliment of confiding to his care a secret and a fortune."

Paul glanced at her quickly with astonishment. Was this ignorance, or suspicion? Her manner, however, suddenly changed, with the charming capriciousness of youth and conscious beauty. "He speaks of you in this letter," she said, letting her dark eyes rest on him provokingly.

"That accounts for your lack of interest then," said Paul gayly, relieved to turn a conversation fraught with so much danger.

"But he speaks very flatteringly," she went on. "He seems to be another one of your admirers. I'm sure, Mr. Hathaway, after that scene in the hotel parlor yesterday, *you*, at least, cannot complain of having been misrepresented before *me*. To tell you the truth, I think I hated you a little for it."

"You were quite right," returned Paul. "I must have been insufferable! And I admit that I was slightly piqued against *you* for the idolatries showered upon you at the same moment by your friends."

Usually, when two young people have reached the point of confidingly exchanging their first impressions of each other, some progress has been made in first acquaintance. But it did not strike Paul in that way, and Yerba's next remark was discouraging.

"But I'm rather disappointed, for all that. Colonel Pendleton tells me you know nothing of my family or of the secret."

Paul was this time quite prepared, and withstood the girl's scrutiny calmly. "Do you think," he asked lightly, "that even *he* knows?"

"Of course he does," she returned quickly. "Do you suppose he would have taken all that trouble you have just talked about if he did n't know it? And feared the consequences, perhaps?" she added, with a slight return of her previous expressive manner.

Again Paul was puzzled and irritated, he knew not why. But he only said pleasantly, "I differ from you there. I am afraid that such a thing as fear never entered into Colonel Pendleton's calculations on any subject. I think he would act the same towards the highest and the lowest, the powerful or the most weak." As she glanced at him

quickly and mischievously, he added, "I am quite willing to believe that his knowledge of you made his duty pleasanter."

He was again quite sincere, and his slight sympathy had that irresistible quality of tone and look which made him so dangerous. For he was struck with the pretty, soothed self-complacency that had shone in her face since he had spoken of Pendleton's equal disinterestedness. It seemed, too, as if what he had taken for passion or petulance in her manner had been only a resistance to some continual aggression of condition. With that remainder held in check, a certain latent nobility was apparent, as of her true self. In this moment of pleased abstraction she had drawn through the lattice-work of one of the windows a spray of roses clinging to the vine, and with her graceful head a little on one side, was softly caressing her cheek with it. She certainly was very pretty. From the crown of her dark little head to the narrow rosetted slippers that had been idly tapping the ground, but now seemed to press it more proudly, with arched insteps and small ankles, she was pleasant to look upon.

"But you surely have something else to think about, Miss Yerba?" said the young man, with conviction. "In a few months you will be of age, and rid of those dreadfully stupid guardians; with your" —

The loosened rose-spray flew from her hand out of the window as she made a gesture, half real, half assumed, of imploring supplication. "Oh, please, Mr. Hathaway, for Heaven's sake don't *you* begin too! You are going to say that, with my wealth, my accomplishments, my beauty, my friends, what more can I want? What do I care about a secret that can neither add to them nor take them away? Yes, you were! It 's the regular thing to say — everybody says it. Why, I should have thought 'the youngest senator' could afford to have been more original."

"I plead guilty to *all* the weaknesses of humanity," said Paul warmly, again beginning to believe that he had been most unjust to her independence.

"Well, I forgive you, because you have forgotten to say that, if I don't like the name of Yerba Buena, I could *so* easily change that too."

"But you *do* like it," said Paul, touched with this first hearing of her name in her own musical accents, "or would like it if you heard yourself pronounce it." It suddenly recurred to him, with a strange thrill of pleasure, that he himself had given it to her. It was as if he had created some musical instrument to which she had just given voice. In his enthusiasm he had thrown himself on the bench beside her in an attitude that, I fear, was not as dignified as became his elderly office.

"But you don't think that is my *name*," said the girl quickly.

"I beg your pardon?" said Paul hesitatingly.

"You don't think that anybody would have been so utterly idiotic as to call me after a ground-vine — a vegetable?" she continued petulantly.

"Eh?" stammered Paul.

"A name that could be so easily translated," she went on, half scornfully, "and when translated, was no possible title for anybody? Think of it — Miss Good Herb! It is too ridiculous for anything."

Paul was not usually wanting in self-possession in an emergency, or in skill to meet attack. But he was so convinced of the truth of the girl's accusation, and now recalled so vividly his own consternation on hearing the result of his youthful and romantic sponsorship for the first time from Pendleton, that he was struck with confusion.

"But what do you suppose it was intended for?" he said at last vaguely. "It was certainly 'Yerba Buena' in the Trust. At least, I suppose so," he corrected himself hurriedly.

"It is only a supposition," she said quietly, "for you know it cannot be proved. The Trust was never recorded, and the only copy could not be found among Mr. Hammersley's papers. It is only part of the name, of which the first is lost."

"Part of the name?" repeated Paul uneasily.

"Part of it. It is a corruption of *de la Yerba Buena*, — of the Yerba Buena, — and refers to the island of Yerba Buena in the bay, and not to the plant. That island was part of the property of my family — the Arguellos — you will find it so recorded in the Spanish grants. My name is Arguello de la Yerba Buena."

It is impossible to describe the timid yet triumphant, the half-appealing yet complacent, conviction of the girl's utterance. A moment before, Paul would have believed it impossible for him to have kept his gravity and his respect for his companion under this egregious illusion. But he kept both. For a sudden conviction that she suspected the truth, and had taken this audacious and original plan of crushing it, overpowered all other sense. The Arguellos, it flashed upon him, were an old Spanish family, former owners of Yerba Buena Island, who had in the last years become extinct. There had been a story that one of them had eloped with an American ship captain's wife at Monterey. The legendary history of early Spanish California was filled with more remarkable incidents, corroborated with little difficulty from Spanish authorities, who, it was alleged, lent themselves readily to any fabrication or forgery. There was no racial pride: on the contrary, they had shown an eager alacrity to ally themselves with their conquerors. The friends of the Arguellos would be proud to recognize and remember in the American heiress the descendant of their countrymen. All this passed rapidly through his mind after the first moment of surprise; all this must have been the deliberate reasoning of this girl of

seventeen, whose dark eyes were bent upon him. Whether she was seeking corroboration or complicity he could not tell.

"Have you found this out yourself?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes. One of my friends at the convent was Josita Castro; she knew all the history of the Arguellos. She is perfectly satisfied."

For an instant Paul wondered if it was a joint conception of the two schoolgirls. But, on reflection, he was persuaded that Yerba would commit herself to no accomplice — of her own sex. She might have dominated the girl, and would make her a firm partisan, while the girl would be convinced of it herself, and believe herself a free agent. He had had such experience with men himself.

"But why have you not spoken of it before — and to Colonel Pendleton?"

"He did not choose to tell *me*," said Yerba, with feminine dexterity. "I have preferred to keep it myself a secret till I am of age."

"When Colonel Pendleton and some of the other trustees have no right to say anything," thought Paul quickly. She had evidently trusted him. Yet, fascinated as he had been by her audacity, he did not know whether to be pleased, or the reverse. He would have preferred to be placed on an equal footing with Josita Castro. She anticipated his thoughts by saying, with half-raised eyelids: —

"What do *you* think of it?"

"It seems to be so natural and obvious an explanation of the mystery that I only wonder it was not thought of before," said Paul, with that perfect sincerity that made his sympathy so effective.

"You see," — still under her pretty eyelids, and the tender promise of a smile parting her little mouth, — "I 'm believing that you tell the truth when you say you don't know anything about it."

It was a desperate moment with Paul, but his sympathetic instincts, and possibly his luck, triumphed. His momentary hesitation easily simulated the caution of a conscientious man; his knit eyebrows and bright eyes, lowered in an effort of memory, did the rest. "I remember it all so indistinctly," he said, with literal truthfulness; "there was a veiled lady present, tall and dark, to whom Mayor Hammersley and the colonel showed a singular, and, it struck me, as an almost superstitious, respect. I remember now, distinctly, I was impressed with the reverential way they both accompanied her to the door at the end of the interview." He raised his eyes slightly; the young girl's red lips were parted; that illumination of the skin, which was her nearest approach to color, had quite transfigured her face. He felt, suddenly, that she believed it, yet he had no sense of remorse. He half believed it himself; at least, he remembered the nobility of the mother's self-renunciation and its effect upon the two men. Why should not the daughter preserve this truthful picture of her mother's momentary exaltation? Which was the most truthful — that, or the degrading facts? "You speak of a secret," he added. "I can remember little more than that the Mayor asked me to forget from that moment the whole occurrence. I did not know at the time how completely I should fulfill his request. You must remember, Miss Yerba, as your Lady Superior has, that I was absurdly young at the time. I don't know but that I may have thought, in my youthful inexperience, that this sort of thing was of common occurrence. And then, I had my own future to make — and youth is brutally selfish. I was quite friendless and unknown when I left San Francisco for the mines, at the time you entered the convent as Yerba Buena."

She smiled, and made a slight impulsive gesture, as if she would have drawn nearer to him, but checked herself, still smiling, and without embarrassment. It may have

been a movement of youthful camaraderie, and that occasional maternal rather than sisterly instinct which sometimes influences a young girl's masculine friendship, and elevates the favored friend to the plane of the doll she has outgrown. As he turned towards her, however, she rose, shook out her yellow dress, and said with pretty petulance : —

"Then you must go so soon — and this your first and last visit as my guardian ? "

" No one could regret that more than I," looking at her with undefined meaning.

" Yes," she said, with a tantalizing coquetry that might have suggested an underlying seriousness. " I think you *have* lost a good deal. Perhaps, so have I. We might have been good friends in all these years. But that is past."

" Why ? Surely, I hope, my shortcomings with Miss Yerba Buena will not be remembered by Miss Arguello ? " said Paul earnestly.

" Ah ! *She* may be a very different person."

" I hope not," said the young man warmly. " But *how* different ? "

" Well, she may not put herself in the way of receiving such point-blank compliments as that," said the young girl demurely.

" Not from her guardian ? "

" She will have no guardian then." She said this gravely, but almost at the same moment turned and sat down again, throwing her linked hands over her knee, and looked at him mischievously. " You see what you have lost, sir."

" I see," said Paul, but with all the gravity that she had dropped.

" No ; but you don't see all. I had no brother — no friend. You might have been both. You might have made

me what you liked. You might have educated me far better than these teachers, or at least given me some pride in my studies. There were so many things I wanted to know that they could n't teach me; so many times I wanted advice from some one that I could trust. Colonel Pendleton was very good to me when he came; he always treated me like a princess even when I wore short frocks. It was his manner that first made me think he knew my family; but I never felt as if I could tell him anything, and I don't think, with all his chivalrous respect, he ever understood me. As to the others — the Mayors — well, you may judge from Mr. Henderson. It is a wonder that I did not run away or do something desperate. Now, are you not a *little* sorry ? "

Her voice, which had as many capricious changes as her manner, and had been alternately coquettish, petulant, and serious, had now become playful again. But, like the rest of her sex, she was evidently more alert to her surroundings at such a moment than her companion, for before he could make any reply, she said, without apparently looking, " But there is a deputation coming for you, Mr. Hathaway. You see, the case is hopeless. You never would be able to give to one what is claimed by the many."

Paul glanced down the rose-alley, and saw that the deputation in question was composed of the Mayor, Mr. Woods, a thin, delicate-looking woman, — evidently Mrs. Woods, — and Milly. The latter managed to reach the summer-house first, with apparently youthful alacrity, but really to exchange, in a single glance, some mysterious feminine signal with Yerba. Then she said with breathless infelicity : —

" Before you two get bored with each other now, I must tell you there 's a chance of your having more time. Aunty has promised to send off a note excusing you to the Reverend Mother, if she can persuade Mr. Hathaway to stay over

to-night. But here they are. [To Yerba] Aunty is most anxious, and won't hear of his going."

Indeed, it seemed as if Mrs. Woods was, after a refined fashion, most concerned that a distinguished visitor like Mr. Hathaway should have to use her house as a mere accidental meeting-place with his ward, without deigning to accept her hospitality. She was reinforced by Mr. Woods, who enunciated the same idea with more masculine vigor; and by the Mayor, who expressed his conviction that a slight of this kind to Rosario would be felt in the Santa Clara valley. "After dinner, my dear Hathaway," concluded Mr. Woods, "a few of our neighbors may drop in, who would be glad to shake you by the hand — no formal meeting, my boy — but, hang it! *they* expect it."

Paul looked around for Yerba. There was really no reason why he should n't accept, although an hour ago the idea had never entered his mind. Yet, if he did, he would like the girl to know that it was for *her* sake. Unfortunately, far from exhibiting any concern in the matter, she seemed to be preoccupied with Milly, and only the charming back of her head was visible behind Mrs. Woods. He accepted, however, with a hesitation that took some of the graciousness from his yielding, and a sense that he was giving a strange importance to a trivial circumstance.

The necessity of attaching himself to his hostess, and making a more extended tour of the grounds, for a while diverted him from an uneasy consideration of his past interview. Mrs. Woods had known Yerba through the school friendship of Milly, and, as far as the religious rules of the convent would allow, had always been delighted to show her any hospitality. She was a beautiful girl — did not Mr. Hathaway think so? — and a girl of great character. It was a pity, of course, that she had never known a mother's care, and that the present routine of a boarding-school had usurped the tender influences of home. She believed, too,

that the singular rotation of guardianship had left the girl practically without a counseling friend to rely upon, except, perhaps, Colonel Pendleton; and while she, Mrs. Woods, did not for a moment doubt that the colonel might be a good friend and a pleasant companion of *men*, really he, Mr. Hathaway, must admit that, with his reputation and habits, he was hardly a fit associate for a young lady. Indeed, Mr. Woods would have never allowed Milly to invite Yerba here if Colonel Pendleton was to have been her escort. Of course, the poor girl could not choose her own guardian, but Mr. Woods said *he* had a right to choose who should be his niece's company. Perhaps Mr. Woods was prejudiced, — most men were, — yet surely Mr. Hathaway, although a loyal friend of Colonel Pendleton's, must admit that when it was an open scandal that the colonel had fought a duel about a notoriously common woman, and even blasphemously defended her before a party of gentlemen, it was high time, as Mr. Woods said, that he should be remanded to their company exclusively. No; Mrs. Woods could not admit that this was owing to the injustice of her own sex! Men are really the ones who make the fuss over those things, just as they, as Mr. Hathaway well knew, made the laws! No; it was a great pity, as she and her husband had just agreed, that Mr. Hathaway, of all the guardians, could not have been always the help and counselor — in fact, the elder brother — of poor Yerba! Paul was conscious that he winced slightly, consistently and conscientiously, at the recollection of certain passages of his youth; inconsistently and meanly at this suggestion of a joint relationship with Yerba's mother.

"I think, too," continued Mrs. Woods, "she has worried foolishly about this ridiculous mystery of her parentage — as if it could make the slightest difference to a girl with a quarter of a million, or as if that did n't show quite conclusively that she *was* somebody!"

"Certainly," said Paul quickly, with a relief that he nevertheless felt was ridiculous.

"And, of course, I dare say it will all come out when she is of age. I suppose you know if any of the family are still living?"

"I really do not."

"I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Woods, with a smile. "I forgot it 's a profound secret until then. But here we are at the house; I see the girls have walked over to our neighbors'. Perhaps you would like to have a few moments to yourself before you dress for dinner, and your portmanteau, which has been sent for, comes from your hotel. You must be tired of seeing so many people."

Paul was glad to accept any excuse for being alone, and, thanking his hostess, followed a servant to his room — a low-ceilinged but luxuriously furnished apartment on the first floor. Here he threw himself on a cushioned lounge that filled the angle of the deep embrasure — the thickness of the old adobe walls — that formed a part of the wooden-latticed window. A Cape jessamine climbing beside it filled the room with its subtle, intoxicating perfume. It was so strong, and he felt himself so irresistibly overpowered and impelled towards a merely idle reverie, that, in order to think more clearly and shut out some strange and unreasoning enthrallment of his senses, he rose and sharply closed the window. Then he sat down and reflected.

What was he doing here? and what was the meaning of all this? He had come simply to fulfill a duty to his past, and please a helpless and misunderstood old acquaintance. He had performed that duty. But he had incidentally learned a certain fact that might be important to this friend, and clearly his duty was simply to go back and report it. He would gain nothing more in the way of corroboration of it by staying now, if further corroboration were required Colonel Pendleton had already been uselessly and absurdly

perplexed about the possible discovery of the girl's parentage, and its effect upon her fortunes and herself. She had just settled that of her own accord, and, without committing herself or others, had suggested a really sensible plan by which all trouble would be avoided in future. That was the common-sense way of looking at it. He would lay the plan before the colonel, have him judge of its expediency and its ethics — and even the question whether she already knew the real truth, or was self-deceived. That done, he would return to his own affairs in Sacramento. There was nothing difficult in this, or that need worry him, only he could have done it just as well an hour ago.

He opened the window again. The scent of the jessamine came in as before, but mingled with the cooler breath of the roses. There was nothing intoxicating or unreal in it now; rather it seemed a gentle aromatic stimulant — of thought. Long shadows of unseen poplars beyond barred the garden lanes and alleys with bands of black and yellow. A slanting pencil of sunshine through the trees was for a moment focused on a bed of waxen callas before a hedge of ceanothus, and struck into dazzling relief the cold white chalices of the flowers and the vivid shining green of their background. Presently it slid beyond to a tiny fountain, before invisible, and wrought a blinding miracle out of its flashing and leaping spray. Yet even as he gazed, the fountain seemed to vanish slowly, the sunbeam slipped on, and beyond it moved the shimmer of white and yellow dresses. It was Yerba and Milly returning to the house. Well, he would not interrupt his reflections by idly watching them; he would, probably, see a great deal of Yerba that evening, and by that time he would have come to some conclusion in regard to her.

But he had not taken into consideration her voice, which, always musical in its Southern intonation and quite audible in the quiet garden, struck him now as being full of joyous

sweetness. Well, she was certainly very happy — or very thoughtless. She was actually romping with Milly, and was now evidently being chased down the rose-alley by that volatile young woman. Then these swift Camillas apparently neared the house, there was the rapid rustle of skirts, the skurrying of little feet on the veranda, a stumble, a mouselike shriek from Milly, and *her* voice, exhausted, dying, happy, broken with half-hushed laughter, rose to him on the breath of the jessamine and rose.

Surely she *was* a child, and, if a child, how he had misjudged her! What if all that he had believed was mature deliberation was only the innocent imaginings of a romantic girl, all that he had taken seriously only a schoolgirl's foolish dream! Instead of combating it, instead of reasoning with her, instead of trying to interest her in other things, he had even helped on her illusions. He had treated her as if the taint of her mother's worldliness and knowledge of evil was in her pure young flesh. He had recognized her as the daughter of an adventuress, and not as his ward, appealing to his chivalry through her very ignorance — it might be her very childish vanity. He had brought to a question of tender and pathetic interest only his selfish opinion of the world and the weaknesses of mankind. The blood came to his cheeks, — with all his experienced self-control, he had not lost the youthful trick of blushing, — and he turned away from the window as if it had breathed a reproach.

But ought he have even contented himself with destroying her illusions — ought he not have gone farther and told her the whole truth? Ought he not first have won her confidence — he remembered bitterly, now, how she had intimated that she had no one to confide in — and, after revealing her mother's history, have still pledged himself to keep the secret from all others, and assisted her in her plan? It would not have altered the state of affairs, except so far as she was concerned; they could have combined together;

his ready wit would have helped him; and his sympathy would have sustained her; but —

How and in what way could he have told her? Leaving out the delicate and difficult periphrase by which her mother's shame would have to be explained to an innocent schoolgirl — what right could he have assumed to tell it? As the guardian who had never counseled or protected her? As an acquaintance of hardly an hour ago? Who would have such a right? A lover — on whose lips it would only seem a tacit appeal to her gratitude or her fears, and whom no sensitive girl could accept thereafter? No. A husband? Yes! He remembered, with a sudden start, what Pendleton had said to him. Good Heavens! Had Pendleton that idea in his mind? And yet — it seemed the only solution.

A knock at his door was followed by the appearance of Mr. Woods. Mr. Hathaway's portmanteau had come, and Mrs. Woods had sent a message, saying that in view of the limited time that Mr. Hathaway would have with his ward, Mrs. Woods would forego her right to keep him at her side at dinner, and yield her place to Yerba. Paul thanked him with a grave inward smile. What if he made his dramatic disclosure to her confidentially over the soup and fish? Yet, in his constantly recurring conviction of the girl's independence, he made no doubt she would have met his brutality with unflinching pride and self-possession. He began to dress slowly, at times almost forgetting himself in a new kind of pleasant apathy, which he attributed to the odor of the flowers, and the softer hush of twilight that had come on with the dying away of the trade-winds, and the restful spice of the bay-trees near his window. He presently found himself not so much thinking of Yerba as of *seeing* her. A picture of her in the summer-house caressing her cheek with the roses seemed to stand out from the shadows of the blank wall opposite him. When he passed into the dressing-room beyond, it was not his own face he saw in the

glass, but hers. It was with a start, as if he had heard *her* voice, that he found upon his dressing-table a small vase containing a flower for his coat, with the penciled words on a card in a schoolgirl's hand, "From Yerba, with thanks for staying." It must have been placed there by a servant while he was musing at the window.

Half a dozen people were already in the drawing-room when Paul descended. It appeared that Mr. Woods had invited certain of his neighbors — among them a Judge Baker and his wife, and Don Cæsar Briones, of the adjacent Rancho of Los Pajaros, and his sister, the Doña Anna. Milly and Yerba had not yet appeared. Don Cæsar, a young man of a toreador build, roundly bland in face and murky in eye, seemed to notice their absence, and kept his glances towards the door, while Paul engaged in conversation with Doña Anna — if that word could convey an impression of a conventionality which that good-humored young lady converted into an animated flirtation at the second sentence with a single glance and two shakes of her fan. And then Milly fluttered in — a vision of schoolgirl freshness and white tulle, and a moment later — with a pause of expectation — a tall, graceful figure, that at first Paul scarcely recognized.

It is a popular conceit of our sex that we are superior to any effect of feminine adornment, and that a pretty girl is equally pretty in the simplest frock. Yet there was not a man in the room who did not believe that Yerba in her present attire was not only far prettier than before, but that she indicated a new and more delicate form of beauty. It was not the mere revelation of contour and color of an ordinary *décolleté* dress, it was a perfect presentment of pure symmetry and carriage. In this black grenadine dress, trimmed with jet, not only was the delicate satin sheen of her skin made clearer by contrast, but she looked every inch her full height, with an ideal exaltation of breeding

and culture. She wore no jewelry except a small necklace of pearls — so small it might have been a child's — that fitted her slender throat so tightly that it could scarcely be told from the flesh that it clasped. Paul did not know that it was the gift of the mother to the child that she had forsworn only a few weeks before she parted from her forever; but he had a vague feeling that, in that sable dress that seemed like mourning, she walked at the funeral of her mother's past. A few white flowers in her corsage, the companions of the solitary one in his buttonhole, were the only relief.

Their eyes met for a single moment, the look of admiration in Paul's being answered by the naïve consciousness in Yerba's of a woman looking her best; but the next moment she appeared preoccupied with the others, and the eager advances of Don Cæsar.

"Your brother seems to admire Miss Yerba," said Paul.

"Ah, ye—es," returned Doña Anna. "And you?"

"Oh!" said Paul gayly, "*I?* *I* am her guardian — with me it is simple egotism, you know."

"Ah!" returned the arch Doña Anna, "you are then already *so* certain of her? Good! I shall warn him."

A precaution that did seem necessary; as later, when Paul, at a signal from his hostess, offered his arm to Yerba, the young Spaniard regarded him with a look of startled curiosity.

"I thank you for selecting me to wear your colors," said Paul, with a glance at the flowers in her corsage, as they sat at table, "and I think I deserve them, since, but for you, I should have been on my way to San Francisco at this moment. Shall I have an opportunity of talking to you a few minutes later in the evening?" he added in a lower tone.

"Why not now?" returned Yerba mischievously. "We are set here expressly for that purpose."

"Surely not to talk of our own business — I should say, of our *family* affairs," said Paul, looking at her with equal playfulness; "though I believe your friend Don Cæsar, opposite, would be more pleased if he were sure that was all we did."

"And you think his sister would share in that pleasure?" retorted Yerba. "I warn you, Mr. Hathaway, that you have been quite justifying the Reverend Mother's doubts about your venerable pretensions. Everybody is staring at you now."

Paul looked up mechanically. It was true. Whether from some occult sympathy, from a human tendency to admire obvious fitness and symmetry, or the innocent love with which the world regards innocent lovers, they were all observing Yerba and himself with undisguised attention. A good talker, he quickly led the conversation to other topics. It was then that he discovered that Yerba was not only accomplished, but that this convent-bred girl had acquired a singular breadth of knowledge apart from the ordinary routine of the school curriculum. She spoke and thought with independent perceptions and clearness, yet without the tactlessness and masculine abruptness that is apt to detract from feminine originality of reflection. By some tacit understanding that had the charm of mutual confidence, they both exerted themselves to please the company rather than each other, and Paul, in the interchange of sallies with Doña Anna, had a certain pleasure in hearing Yerba converse in Spanish with Don Cæsar. But in a few moments he observed, with some uneasiness, that they were talking of the old Spanish occupation, and presently of the old Spanish families. Would she prematurely expose an ignorance that might be hereafter remembered against her, or invite some dreadful genealogical reminiscence that would destroy her hopes and raze her Spanish castles? Or was she simply collecting information? He admired the dex-

terity with which, without committing herself, she made Don Cæsar openly and even confidentially communicative. And yet he was on thorns; at times it seemed as if he himself were playing a part in this imposture of Yerba's. He was aware that his wandering attention was noticed by the quick-witted Doña Anna, when he regained his self-possession by what appeared to be a happy diversion. It was the voice of Mrs. Judge Baker calling across the table to Yerba. By one of the peculiar accidents of general conversation, it was the one apparently trivial remark that in a pause challenged the ears of all.

"We were admiring your necklace, Miss Yerba."

Every eye was turned upon the slender throat of the handsome girl. The excuse was so natural.

Yerba put her hand to her neck with a smile. "You are joking, Mrs. Baker. I know it is ridiculously small, but it is a child's necklace, and I wear it because it was a gift from my mother."

Paul's heart sank again with consternation. It was the first time he had heard the girl distinctly connect herself with her actual mother, and for an instant he felt as startled as if the forgotten Outcast herself had returned and taken a seat at the board.

"I told you it could n't be so!" remarked Mrs. Baker to her husband.

Everybody naturally looked inquiringly upon the couple, and Mrs. Baker explained with a smile, "Bob thinks he 's seen it before; men are so obstinate."

"Pardon me, Miss Yerba," said the Judge blandly, "would you mind showing it to me, if it is not too much trouble?"

"Not at all," said Yerba, smiling, and detaching the circlet from her neck. "I 'm afraid you 'll find it rather old-fashioned."

"That 's just what I hope to find it," said Judge

Baker, with a triumphant glance at his wife. "It was eight years ago when I saw it in Tucker's jewelry shop. I wanted to buy it for my little Minnie, but as the price was steep I hesitated, and when I did make up my mind he had disposed of it to another customer. Yes," he added, examining the necklace which Yerba had handed to him, "I am certain it is the same: it was unique, like this. Odd, is n't it ? "

Everybody said it *was* odd, and looked upon the occurrence with that unreasoning satisfaction with which average humanity receives the most trivial and unmeaning coincidences. It was left to Don Cæsar to give it a gallant application.

"I have not-a the pleasure of knowing-a the Miss Minnie, but the jewelry, when she arrives, to the throat-a of Miss Yerba, she has not lost the value — the beauty — the charm."

"No," said Woods cheerily. "The fact is, Baker, you were too slow. Miss Yerba's folks gobbled up the necklace while you were thinking. You were a newcomer. Old 'forty-niners' did not hesitate over a thing they wanted."

"You never knew who was your successful rival, eh ? " said Doña Anna, turning to Judge Baker, with a curious glance at Paul's pale face in passing.

"No," said Baker, "but " — he stopped with a hesitating laugh and some little confusion. "No, I 've mixed it up with something else. It 's so long ago. I never knew, or if I did I 've forgotten. But the necklace I remember." He handed it back to Yerba with a bow, and the incident ended.

Paul had not looked at Yerba during this conversation, an unreasoning instinct that he might confuse her, an equally unreasoning dread that he might see her confused by others, possessing him. And when he did glance at her

calm, untroubled face, that seemed only a little surprised at his own singular coldness, he was by no means relieved. He was only convinced of one thing. In the last five minutes he had settled upon the irrevocable determination that his present relations with the girl could exist no longer. He must either tell her everything, or see her no more. There was no middle course. She was on the brink of an exposure at any moment, either through her ignorance or her unhappy pretension. In his intolerable position, he was equally unable to contemplate her peril, accept her defense, or himself defend her.

As if, with some feminine instinct, she had attributed his silence to some jealousy of Don Cæsar's attentions, she more than once turned from the Spaniard to Paul with an assuring smile. In his anxiety, he half accepted the rather humiliating suggestion, and managed to say to her in a lower tone : —

"On this last visit of your American guardian, one would think, you need not already anticipate your Spanish relations."

He was thrilled with the mischievous yet faintly tender pleasure that sparkled in her eyes as she said : —

"You forget it is my American guardian's *first* visit, as well as his last."

"And as your guardian," he went on, with half-veiled seriousness, "I protest against your allowing your treasures, the property of the Trust," he gazed directly into her beautiful eyes, "being handled and commented upon by everybody."

When the ladies had left the table, he was, for a moment, relieved. But only for a moment. Judge Baker drew his chair beside Paul's, and, taking his cigar from his lips, said, with a perfunctory laugh : —

"I say, Hathaway, I pulled up just in time to save myself from making an awful speech, just now, to your ward."

Paul looked at him with cold curiosity.

"Yes. Gad! Do you know *who* was my rival in that necklace transaction?"

"No," said Paul, with frigid carelessness.

"Why, Kate Howard! Fact, sir. She bought it right under my nose — and overbid me, too."

Paul did not lose his self-possession. Thanks to the fact that Yerba was not present, and that Don Cæsar, who had overheard the speech, moved forward with a suggestive and unpleasant smile, his agitation congealed into a coldly placid fury.

"And I suppose," he replied, with perfect calmness, "that after the usual habit of this class of women, the necklace very soon found its way back, through the pawnbroker, to the jeweler again. It 's a common fate."

"Yes, of course," returned Judge Baker cheerfully. "You 're quite right. That 's undoubtedly the solution of it. But," with a laugh, "I had a narrow escape from saying something — eh?"

"A very narrow escape from an apparently gratuitous insult," said Paul gravely, but fixing his eyes, now more luminous than ever with anger, not on the speaker, but on the face of Don Cæsar, who was standing at his side. "You were about to say" —

"Eh — oh — ah! this Kate Howard? So! I have heard of her — yees! And Miss Yerba — ah — she is of my country — I think. Yes — we shall claim her — of a truth — yes."

"Your countrymen, I believe, are in the habit of making claims that are more often founded on profit than verity," said Paul, with smileless and insulting deliberation. He knew perfectly what he was saying, and the result he expected. Only twenty-four hours before he had smiled at Pendleton's idea of averting scandal and discovery by fighting, yet he was endeavoring to pick a quarrel with a

man, merely on suspicion, for the same purpose, and he saw nothing strange in it. A vague idea, too, that this would irrevocably confirm him in opposition to Yerba's illusions probably determined him.

But Don Cæsar, albeit smiling lividly, did not seem inclined to pick up the gauntlet, and Woods interfered hastily. "Don Cæsar means that your ward has some idea herself that she is of Spanish origin — at least, Milly says so. But of course, as one of the oldest trustees, *you* know the facts."

In another moment Paul would have committed himself. "I think we 'll leave Miss Yerba out of the question," he said coldly. "My remark was a general one, although, of course, I am responsible for any personal application of it."

"Spoken like a politician, Hathaway," said Judge Baker, with an effusive enthusiasm, which he hoped would atone for the alarming results of his infelicitous speech. "That 's right, gentlemen! You can't get the facts from him before he is ready to give them. Keep your secret, Mr. Hathaway, the court is with you."

Nevertheless, as they passed out of the room to join the ladies, the Mayor lingered a little behind with Woods. "It 's easy to see the influence of that Pendleton on our young friend," he said significantly. "Somebody ought to tell him that it 's played out down here — as Pendleton is. It 's quite enough to ruin his career."

Paul was too observant not to notice this, but it brought him no sense of remorse; and his youthful belief in himself and his power kept him from concern. He felt as if he had done something, if only to show Don Cæsar that the girl's weakness or ignorance could not be traded upon with impunity. But he was still undecided as to the course he should pursue. But he should determine that to-night. At present there seemed no chance of talking to her alone —

she was unconcernedly conversing with Milly and Mrs. Woods, and already the visitors who had been invited to this hurried levee in his honor were arriving. In view of his late indiscretion, he nervously exerted his fullest powers, and in a very few minutes was surrounded by a breathless and admiring group of worshipers. A ludicrous resemblance to the scene in the Golden Gate Hotel passed through his mind; he involuntarily turned his eyes to seek Yerba in the half-fear, half-expectation of meeting her mischievous smile. Their glances met; to his surprise hers was smileless, and instantly withdrawn, but not until he had been thrilled by an unconscious prepossession in its luminous depths that he scarcely dared to dwell upon. What mattered now this passage with Don Cæsar or the plaudits of his friends? *She* was proud of him!

Yet, after that glance, she was shy, preoccupying herself with Milly, or even listening sweetly to Judge Baker's somewhat practical and unromantic reminiscences of the deprivations and the hardships of California early days, as if to condone his past infelicity. She was pleasantly unaffected with Don Cæsar, although she managed to draw Doña Anna into the conversation; she was unconventional, Paul fancied, to all but himself. Once or twice, when he had artfully drawn her towards the open French window that led to the moonlit garden and shadowed veranda, she had managed to link Milly's arm in her own, and he was confident that a suggestion to stroll with him in the open air would be followed by her invitation to Milly to accompany them. Disappointed and mortified as he was, he found some solace in her manner, which he still believed suggested the hope that she might be made accessible to his persuasions. Persuasions to what? He did not know.

The last guest had departed; he lingered on the veranda with a cigar, begging his host and hostess not to trouble themselves to keep him company. Milly and Yerba had

retired to the former's boudoir, but, as they had not yet formally bade him good-night, there was a chance of their returning. He still stayed on in this hope for half an hour, and then, accepting Yerba's continued absence as a tacit refusal of his request, he turned abruptly away. But as he glanced around the garden before reëntering the house, he was struck by a singular circumstance — a white patch, like a forgotten shawl, which he had observed on the distant ceanothus hedge, and which had at first thrilled him with expectation, had certainly *changed its position.* Before, it seemed to be near the summer-house; now it was, undoubtedly, farther away. Could they, or *she* alone, have slipped from the house and be awaiting him there? With a muttered exclamation at his stupidity he stepped hastily from the veranda and walked towards it. But he had scarcely proceeded a dozen yards before it disappeared. He reached the summer-house — it was empty; he followed the line of hedge — no one was there. It could not have been she, or she would have waited, unless he were the victim of a practical joke. He turned impatiently back to the house, reëntered the drawing-room by the French window, and was crossing the half-lit apartment, when he heard a slight rustle in the shadow of the window. He looked around quickly, and saw that it was Yerba, in a white, loose gown, for which she had already exchanged her black evening dress, leaning back composedly on the sofa, her hands clasped behind her shapely head.

"I am waiting for Milly," she said, with a faint smile on her lips. He fancied, in the moonlight that streamed upon her, that her beautiful face was pale. "She has gone to the other wing to see one of the servants who is ill. We thought you were on the veranda smoking and I should have company, until I saw you start off, and rush up and down the hedge like mad."

Paul felt that he was losing his self-possession, and be

coming nervous in her presence. "I thought it was *you*," he stammered.

"Me! Out in the garden at this hour, alone, and in the broad moonlight? What are you thinking of, Mr. Hathaway? Do you know anything of convent rules, or is that your idea of your ward's education?"

He fancied that, though she smiled faintly, her voice was as tremulous as his own.

"I want to speak with you," he said, with awkward directness. "I even thought of asking you to stroll with me in the garden."

"Why not talk here?" she returned, changing her position, pointing to the other end of the sofa, and drawing the whole overflow of her skirt to one side. "It is not so very late, and Milly will return in a few moments."

Her face was in shadow now, but there was a glow-worm light in her beautiful eyes that seemed faintly to illuminate her whole face. He sank down on the sofa at her side, no longer the brilliant and ambitious politician, but, it seemed to him, as hopelessly a dreaming, inexperienced boy as when he had given her the name that now was all he could think of, and the only word that rose to his feverish lips.

"Yerba!"

"I like to hear you say it," she said quickly, as if to gloss over his first omission of her formal prefix, and leaning a little forward, with her eyes on his. "One would think you had created it. You almost make me regret to lose it."

He stopped. He felt that the last sentence had saved him. "It is of that I want to speak," he broke out suddenly and almost rudely. "Are you satisfied that it means nothing, and can mean nothing, to you? Does it awaken no memory in your mind — recall nothing you care to know? Think! I beg you, I implore you to be frank with me!"

She looked at him with surprise.

"I have told you already that my present name must be some absurd blunder, or some intentional concealment. But why do you want to know *now?*" she continued, adding her faint smile to the emphasis.

"To help you!" he said eagerly. "For that alone! To do all I can to assist you, if you really believe, and want to believe, that you have another. To ask you to confide in me; to tell me all you have been told, all that you know, think you know, or *want* to know about your relationship to the Arguellos — or to — any one. And then to devote myself entirely to proving what you shall say is your desire. You see, I am frank with you, Yerba. I only ask you to be as frank with me; to let me know your doubts, that I may counsel you; your fears, that I may give you courage."

"Is that all you came here to tell me?" she asked quietly.

"No, Yerba," he said eagerly, taking her unresisting but indifferent hand, "not all; but all that I must say, all that I have the right to say, all that you, Yerba, would permit me to tell you *now*. But let me hope that the day is not far distant when I can tell you *all*, when you will understand that this silence has been the hardest sacrifice of the man who now speaks to you."

"And yet not unworthy of a rising politician," she added, quickly withdrawing her hand. "I agree," she went on, looking towards the door, yet without appearing to avoid his eager eyes, "and when I have settled upon 'a local habitation and a name' we shall renew this interesting conversation. Until then, as my fourth official guardian used to say — he was a lawyer, Mr. Hathaway, like yourself — when he was winding up his conjectures on the subject — all that has passed is to be considered 'without prejudice.'"

"But Yerba" — began Paul bitterly.

She slightly raised her hand as if to check him with a warning gesture. "Yes, dear," she said suddenly, lifting her musical voice, with a mischievous side-glance at Paul, as if to indicate her conception of the irony of a possible application, "this way. Here we are waiting for you." Her listening ear had detected Milly's step in the passage, and in another moment that cheerful young woman discreetly stopped on the threshold of the room, with every expression of apologetic indiscretion in her face.

"We have finished our talk, and Mr. Hathaway has been so concerned about my having no real name that he has been promising me everything, but his own, for a suitable one. Have n't you, Mr. Hathaway?" She rose slowly and, going over to Milly, put her arm around her waist and stood for one instant gazing at him between the curtains of the doorway. "Good-night. My very proper chaperon is dreadfully shocked at this midnight interview, and is taking me away. Only think of it, Milly; he actually proposed to me to walk in the garden with him! Good-night, or, as my ancestors — don't forget, *my ancestors* — used to say, '*Buena noche — hasta mañana!*'" She lingered over the Spanish syllables with an imitation of Doña Anna's lisp, and with another smile, but more faint and more ghost-like than before, vanished with her companion.

At eight o'clock the next morning Paul was standing beside his portmanteau on the veranda.

"But this is a sudden resolution of yours, Hathaway," said Mr. Woods. "Can you not possibly wait for the next train? The girls will be down then, and you can breakfast comfortably."

"I have much to do — more than I imagined — in San Francisco before I return," said Paul quickly. "You must make my excuses to them and to your wife."

"I hope," said Woods, with an uneasy laugh, "you have had no more words with Don Cæsar, or he with you?"

"No," said Paul, with a reassuring smile, "nothing more, I assure you."

"For you know you're a devilish quick fellow, Hathaway," continued Woods, "quite as quick as your friend Pendleton. And, by the way, Baker is awfully cut up about that absurd speech of his, you know. Came to me last night and wondered if anybody could think it was intentional. I told him it was d—d stupid, that was all. I guess his wife had been at him. Ha! ha! You see, he remembers the old times, when everybody talked of these things, and that woman Howard was quite a character. I'm told she went off to the States years ago."

"Possibly," said Paul carelessly. After a pause, as the carriage drove up to the door, he turned to his host. "By the way, Woods, have you a ghost here?"

"The house is old enough for one. But no. Why?"

"I'll swear I saw a figure moving yonder, in the shrubbery, late last evening; and when I came up to it, it most unaccountably disappeared."

"One of Don Cæsar's servants, I dare say. There is one of them, an Indian, prowling about here, I've been told, at all hours. I'll put a stop to it. Well, you must go then? Dreadfully sorry you couldn't stop longer! Good-by!"

CHAPTER IV

It was two months later that Mr. Tony Shear, of Marysville, but lately confidential clerk to the Honorable Paul Hathaway, entered his employer's chambers in Sacramento, and handed the latter a letter.

"I only got back from San Francisco this morning; but Mr. Slate said I was to give you that, and if it satisfied you, and was what you wanted, you would send it back to him."

Paul took the envelope and opened it. It contained a printer's proof-slip, which he hurriedly glanced over. It read as follows: —

"Those of our readers who are familiar with the early history of San Francisco will be interested to know that an eccentric and irregular trusteeship, vested for the last eight years in the Mayor of San Francisco and two of our oldest citizens, was terminated yesterday by the majority of a beautiful and accomplished young lady, a pupil of the Convent of Santa Clara. Very few, except the original trustees, were cognizant of the fact that the administration of the trustees has been a recognized function of the successive Mayors of San Francisco during this period; and the mystery surrounding it has been only lately divulged. It offers a touching and romantic instance of a survival of the old patriarchal duties of the former *Alcaldes* and the simplicity of pioneer days. It seems that, in the unsettled conditions of the Mexican land-titles that followed the American occupation, the consumptive widow of a scion of one of the oldest Californian families intrusted her property and

the custody of her infant daughter virtually to the city of San Francisco, as represented by the trustees specified, until the girl should become of age. Within a year, the invalid mother died. With what loyalty, sagacity, and prudence these gentlemen fulfilled their trust may be gathered from the fact that the property left in their charge has not only been secured and protected, but increased a hundredfold in value; and that the young lady, who yesterday attained her majority, is not only one of the richest landed heiresses on the Pacific Slope, but one of the most accomplished and thoroughly educated of her sex. It is now no secret that this favored child of Chrysopolis is the Doña Maria Concepcion de Arguello de la Yerba Buena, so called from her ancestral property on the island, now owned by the Federal government. But it is an affecting and poetic tribute to the parent of her adoption that she has preferred to pass under the old, quaintly typical name of the city, and has been known to her friends simply as 'Miss Yerba Buena.' It is a no less pleasant and suggestive circumstance that our 'youngest senator,' the Honorable Paul Hathaway, formerly private secretary to Mayor Hammersley, is one of the original unofficial trustees; while the chivalry of the older days is perpetuated in the person of Colonel Harry Pendleton, the remaining trustee."

As soon as he had finished, Paul took a pencil and crossed out the last sentence; but instead of laying the proof aside, or returning it to the waiting secretary, he remained with it in his hand, his silent, set face turned towards the window. Whether the merely human secretary was tired of waiting, or the devoted partisan saw something on his young chief's face that disturbed him, he turned to Paul with that exaggerated respect which his functions as secretary had grafted upon his affection for his old associate, and said: —

"I hope nothing 's wrong, sir. Not another of those

scurrilous attacks on you for putting that bill through to relieve Colonel Pendleton? Yet it was a risky thing for you, sir."

Paul started, recovered himself as if from some remote abstraction, and, with a smile, said: "No, — nothing. Quite the reverse. Write to Mr. Slate, thank him, and say that it will do very well — with the exception of the lines I have marked out. Then bring me the letter, and I will add this inclosure. Did you call on Colonel Pendleton?"

"Yes, sir. He was at Santa Clara, and had not yet returned, — at least, that 's what that dandy nigger of his told me. The airs and graces that that creature puts on since the colonel's affairs have been straightened out are a little too much for a white man to stand. Why, sir! d—d if he did n't want to patronize *you*, and allowed to me that 'de kernel' had a 'fah ideah' of you, 'and thought you a promisin' young man.' The fact is, sir, the party is making a big mistake trying to give votes to that kind of cattle — it would only be giving two votes to the other side, for, slave or free, they 're the chattels of their old masters. And as to the masters' gratitude for what you 've done affecting a single vote of their party — you 're mistaken."

"Colonel Pendleton belongs to no party," said Paul curtly; "but if his old constituents ever try to get into power again, they 've lost their only independent martyr."

He presently became abstracted again, and Shear produced from his overcoat pocket a series of official-looking documents.

"I 've brought the reports, sir."

"Eh?" said Paul absently.

The secretary stared. "The reports of the San Francisco Chief of Police that you asked me to get." His employer was certainly very forgetful to-day.

"Oh yes; thank you. You can lay them on my desk.

I'll look them over in Committee. You can go now, and if any one calls to see me say I 'm busy."

The secretary disappeared in the adjoining room, and Paul leaned back in his chair, thinking. He had, at last, effected the work he had resolved upon when he left Rosario two months ago; the article he had just read, and which would appear as an editorial in the San Francisco paper the day after to-morrow, was the culmination of quietly persistent labor, inquiry, and deduction, and would be accepted, hereafter, as authentic history, which, if not thoroughly established, at least could not be gainsaid. Immediately on arriving at San Francisco, he had hastened to Pendleton's bedside, and laid the facts and his plan before him. To his mingled astonishment and chagrin, the colonel had objected vehemently to this "saddling of anybody's offspring on a gentleman who could n't defend himself," and even Paul's explanation that the putative father was a myth scarcely appeased him. But Paul's timely demonstration, by relating the scene he had witnessed of Judge Baker's infelicitous memory, that the secret was likely to be revealed at any moment, and that if the girl continued to cling to her theory, as he feared she would, even to the parting with her fortune, they would be forced to accept it, or be placed in the hideous position of publishing her disgrace, at last convinced him. On the other hand, there was less danger of her *positive* imposition being discovered than of the *vague and impositive* truth. The real danger lay in the present uncertainty and mystery, which courted surmise and invited discovery. Paul, himself, was willing to take all the responsibility, and at last extracted from the colonel a promise of passive assent. The only revelation he feared was from the interference of the mother, but Pendleton was strong in the belief that she had not only utterly abandoned the girl to the care of her guardians, but that she would never rescind her resolution to disclaim her

relationship ; that she had gone into self-exile for that purpose ; and that if she *had* changed her mind, he would be the first to know of it. On this day they had parted. Meantime, Paul had not forgotten another resolution he had formed on his first visit to the colonel, and had actually succeeded in getting legislative relief for the Golden Gate Bank, and restoring to the colonel some of his private property that had been in the hands of a receiver.

This had been the background of Paul's meditation, which only threw into stronger relief the face and figure that moved before him as persistently as it had once before in the twilight of his room at Rosario. There were times when her moonlit face, with its faint, strange smile, stood out before him as it had stood out of the shadows of the half-darkened drawing-room that night; as he had seen it — he believed for the last time — framed for an instant in the parted curtains of the doorway, when she bade him "good-night." For he had never visited her since, and, on the attainment of her majority, had delegated his passing functions to Pendleton, whom he had induced to accompany the Mayor to Santa Clara for the final and formal ceremony. For the present she need not know how much she had been indebted to him for the accomplishment of her wishes.

With a sigh he at last recalled himself to his duty, and, drawing the pile of reports which Shear had handed him, he began to examine them. These, again, bore reference to his silent, unobtrusive inquiries. In his function as Chairman of Committee he had taken advantage of a kind of advanced moral legislation then in vogue, and particularly in reference to a certain social reform, to examine statistics, authorities, and witnesses, and in this indirect but exhaustive manner had satisfied himself that the woman "Kate Howard," alias "Beverly," alias "Durfree," had long passed beyond the ken of local police supervision, and

that in the record there was no trace or indication of her child. He was going over those infelix records of early transgressions with the eye of trained experience, making notes from time to time for his official use, and yet always watchful of his secret quest, when suddenly he stopped with a quickened pulse. In the record of an affray at a gambling-house, one of the parties had sought refuge in the rooms of "Kate Howard," who was represented before the magistrate by *her protector, Juan de Arguello.* The date given was contemporary with the beginning of the Trust, but that proved nothing. But the name — had it any significance, or was it a grim coincidence, that spoke even more terribly and hopelessly of the woman's promiscuous frailty? He again attacked the entire report, but there was no other record of her name. Even that would have passed any eye less eager and watchful than his own.

He laid the reports aside, and took up the proof-slip again. Was there any man living but himself and Pendleton who would connect these two statements? That her relations with this Arguello were brief and not generally known was evident from Pendleton's ignorance of the fact. But he must see him again, and at once. Perhaps he might have acquired some information from Yerba; the young girl might have given to his age that confidence she had withheld from the younger man; indeed, he remembered with a flush it was partly in that hope he had induced the colonel to go to Santa Clara. He put the proof-slip in his pocket and stepped to the door of the next room.

"You need not write that letter to Slate, Tony. I will see him myself. I am going to San Francisco to-night."

"And do you want anything copied from the reports, sir?"

Paul quickly swept them from the table into his drawer, and locked it. "Not now, thank you. I'll finish my notes later."

The next morning Paul was in San Francisco, and had again crossed the portals of the Golden Gate Hotel. He had been already told that the doom of that palatial edifice was sealed by the laying of the corner-stone of a new erection in the next square that should utterly eclipse it; he even fancied that it had already lost its freshness, and its meretricious glitter had been tarnished. But when he had ordered his breakfast he made his way to the public parlor, happily deserted at that early hour. It was here that he had first seen her. She was standing there, by that mirror, when their eyes first met in a sudden instinctive sympathy. She herself had remembered and confessed it. He recalled the pleased yet conscious, girlish superiority with which she had received the adulation of her friends; his memory of her was broad enough now even to identify Milly, as it re-peopled the vacant and silent room.

An hour later he was making his way to Colonel Pendleton's lodgings, and half expecting to find the St. Charles Hotel itself transformed by the eager spirit of improvement. But it was still there in all its barbaric and provincial incongruity. Public opinion had evidently recognized that nothing save the absolute razing of its warped and flimsy walls could effect a change, and waited for it to collapse suddenly like the house of cards it resembled. Paul wondered for a moment if it were not ominous of its lodgers' helpless inability to accept changed conditions, and it was with a feeling of doubt that he even now ascended the creaking staircase. But it was instantly dissipated on the threshold of the colonel's sitting-room by the appearance of George and his reception of his master's guest.

The grizzled negro was arrayed in a surprisingly new suit of blue cloth with a portentous white waistcoat and an enormous crumpled white cravat, that gave him the appearance of suffering from a glandular swelling. His manner had, it seemed to Paul, advanced in exaggeration with

his clothes. Dusting a chair and offering it to the visitor, he remained gracefully posed with his hand on the back of another.

"Yo' finds us heah yet, Marse Hathaway," he began, elegantly toying with an enormous silver watch-chain, "fo' de kernel he don' bin find contagious apartments dat at all approximate, and he don' build, for his mind 's not dat settled that he ain't goin' to trabbel. De place is low down, sah, and de fo'ks is low down, and dah 's a heap o' white trash dat has congested under de roof ob de hotel since we came. But we uses it temper'ly, sah, fo' de present, and in a dissolutory fashion."

It struck Paul that the contiguity of a certain barber's shop and its dangerous reminiscences had something to do with George's lofty depreciation of his surroundings, and he could not help saying : —

"Then you don't find it necessary to have it convenient to the barber's shop any more? I am glad of that, George."

The shot told. The unfortunate George, after an endeavor to collect himself by altering his pose two or three times in rapid succession, finally collapsed, and, with an air of mingled pain and dignity, but without losing his ceremonious politeness or unique vocabulary, said : —

"Yo' got me dah, sah! Yo' got me dah! De infirmities o' human natcheh, sah, is the common p'operty ob man, and a gemplum like yo'self, sah, a legislato' and a pow'ful speakah, is de lass one to hol' it agin de individal pusson. I confess, sah, de circumstances was propiskuous, de fees fahly good, and de risks inferior. De gemplum who kept de shop was an artess hisself, and had been niggah to Kernel Henderson, of Tennessee, and de gemplum I relieved was a Mr. Johnson. But de kernel, he would n't see it in dat light, sah, and if yo' don' mind, sah"—

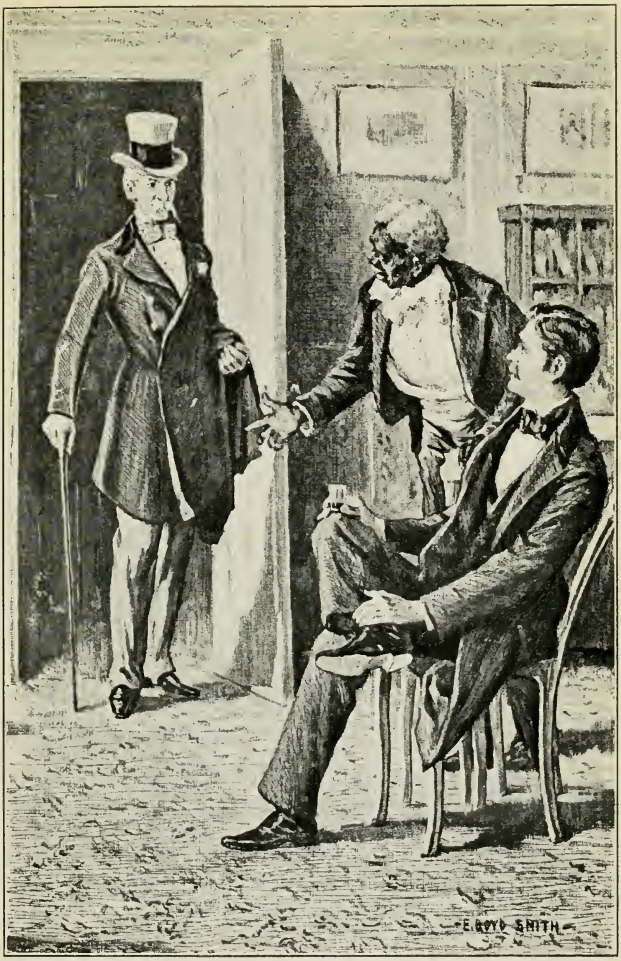
"I have n't the slightest idea of telling the colonel or

anybody, George," said Paul, smiling; "and I am glad to find on your own account that you are able to put aside any work beyond your duty here."

"Thank yo', sah. If yo' 'll let me introduce yo' to de refreshment, yo' 'll find it all right now. De Glencoe is dah. De kernel will be here soon, but he would be pow'-ful mo'tified, sah, if yo' did n't hab something afo' he come." He opened a well-filled sideboard as he spoke. It was the first evidence Paul had seen of the colonel's restored fortunes. He would willingly have contented himself with this mere outward manifestation, but in his desire to soothe the ruffled dignity of the old man he consented to partake of a small glass of spirits. George at once became radiant and communicative. "De kernel bin gone to Santa Clara to see de young lady dat 's finished her edercation dah — de kernel's only ward, sah. She 's one o' dose million-heiresses and highly connected, sah, wid de old Mexican gobbermen, I understand. And I reckon dey 's bin big goin's on doun dar, foh de Mayer kem hisself fo' de kernel. Looks like des might bin a proceshon, sah. Yo' dón' know of a young lady bin hab a title, sah? I won't be shuah, his Honah de Mayer or de kernel did n't say someting about a 'Donna.'"

"Very likely," said Paul, turning away with a faint smile. So it was already in the air! Setting aside the old negro's characteristic exaggeration, there had already been some conversation between the colonel and the Mayor, which George had vaguely overheard. He might be too late, the alternative might be no longer in his hands. But his discomposure was heightened a moment later by the actual apparition of the returning Pendleton.

He was dressed in a tightly buttoned blue frock coat, which fairly accented his tall, thin military figure, although the top lapel was thrown far enough back to show a fine ruffled cambric shirt and checked gingham necktie, and was



THE RETURNING PENDLETON

itself adorned with a white rosebud in the buttonhole. Fawn-colored trousers strapped over narrow patent-leather boots, and a tall white hat, whose broad mourning-band was a perpetual memory of his mother, who had died in his boyhood, completed his festal transformation. Yet his erect carriage, high aquiline nose, and long gray drooping mustache lent a distinguishing grace to this survival of a bygone fashion, and over-rode any irreverent comment. Even his slight limp seemed to give a peculiar character to his massive gold-headed stick, and made it a part of his formal elegance.

Handing George his stick and a military cape he carried easily over his left arm, he greeted Paul warmly, yet with a return of his old dominant manner.

"Glad to see you, Hathaway, and glad to see the boy has served you better than the last time. If I had known you were coming, I would have tried to get back in time to have breakfast with you. But your friends at Rosario — I think they call it; in my time it was owned by Colonel Briones, and *he* called it 'The Devil's Little Cañon' — detained me with some d—d civilities. Let 's see — his name is Woods, is n't it? Used to sell rum to runaway sailors on Long Wharf, and take stores in exchange? Or was it Baker? — Judge Baker? I forget which. Well, sir, they wished to be remembered."

It struck Paul, perhaps unreasonably, that the colonel's indifference and digression were both a little assumed, and he asked abruptly: —

"And you fulfilled your mission?"

"I made the formal transfer, with the Mayor, of the property to Miss Arguello."

"To Miss Arguello?"

"To the Doña Maria Concepcion de Arguello de la Yerba Buena — to speak precisely," said the colonel slowly. "George, you can take that hat to that blank hatter —

what 's his blanked name ? I read it only yesterday in a list of the prominent citizens here — and tell him, with my compliments, that I want a *gentleman's* mourning-band around my hat, and not a child's shoelace. It may be *his* idea of the value of his own parents, — if he ever had any, — but I don't care for him to appraise mine. Go ! "

As the door closed upon George, Paul turned to the colonel —

" Then am I to understand that you have agreed to her story ? "

The colonel rose, picked up the decanter, poured out a glass of whiskey, and holding it in his hand, said : —

" My dear Hathaway, let us understand each other. As a gentleman, I have made a point through life never to question the age, name, or family of any lady of my acquaintance. Miss Yerba Buena came of age yesterday, and, as she is no longer my ward, she is certainly entitled to the consideration I have just mentioned. If she, therefore, chooses to tack to her name the whole Spanish directory, I don't see why I should n't accept it."

Characteristic as this speech appeared to be of the colonel's ordinary manner, it struck Paul as being only an imitation of his usual frank independence, and made him uneasily conscious of some vague desertion on Pendleton's part. He fixed his bright eyes on his host, who was ostentatiously sipping his liquor, and said : —

" Am I to understand that you have heard nothing more from Miss Yerba, either for or against her story ? That you still do not know whether she has deceived herself, has been deceived by others, or is deceiving us ? "

" After what I have just told you, Mr. Hathaway," said the colonel, with an increased exaggeration of manner which Paul thought must be apparent even to himself, " I should have but one way of dealing with questions of that kind from anybody but yourself."

This culminating extravagance — taken in connection with Pendleton's passing doubts — actually forced a laugh from Paul in spite of his bitterness.

Colonel Pendleton's face flushed quickly. Like most positive one-idea'd men, he was restricted from any possible humorous combination, and only felt a mysterious sense of being detected in some weakness. He put down his glass.

"Mr. Hathaway," he began, with a slight vibration in his usual dominant accents, "you have lately put me under a sense of personal obligation for a favor which I felt I could accept without derogation from a younger man, because it seemed to be one not only of youthful generosity but of justice, and was not unworthy the exalted ambition of a young man like yourself or the simple deserts of an old man such as I am. I accepted it, sir, the more readily, because it was entirely unsolicited by me, and seemed to be the spontaneous offering of your own heart. If I have presumed upon it to express myself freely on other matters in a way that only excites your ridicule, I can but offer you an apology, sir. If I have accepted a favor I can neither renounce nor return, I must take the consequences to myself, and even beg *you*, sir, to put up with them."

Remorseful as Paul felt, there was a singular resemblance between the previous reproachful pose of George and this present attitude of his master, as if the mere propinquity of personal sacrifice had made them alike, that struck him with a mingled pathos and ludicrousness. But he said warmly, "It is I who must apologize, my dear colonel. I am not laughing at your conclusions, but at this singular coincidence with a discovery I have made."

"As how, sir?"

"I find in the report of the Chief of Police for the year 1850 that Kate Howard was under the protection of a man named Arguello."

The colonel's exaggeration instantly left him. He

stared blankly at Paul. "And you call this a laughing matter, sir?" he said sternly, but in his more natural manner.

"Perhaps not, but I don't think, if you will allow me to say so, my dear colonel, that *you* have been treating the whole affair very seriously. I left you two months ago utterly opposed to views which you are now treating as of no importance. And yet you wish me to believe that nothing has happened, and that you have no further information than you had then. That this is so, and that you are really no nearer the *facts*, I am willing to believe from your ignorance of what I have just told you, and your concern at it. But that you have not been influenced in your *judgment* of what you do know, I cannot believe." He drew nearer Pendleton, and laid his hand upon his arm. "I beg you to be frank with me, for the sake of the person whose interests I see you have at heart. In what way will the discovery I have just made affect them? You are not so far prejudiced as to be blind to the fact that it may be dangerous because it seems corroborative."

Pendleton coughed, rose, took his stick, and limped up and down the room, finally dropping into an armchair by the window, with his cane between his knees, and the drooping gray silken threads of his long mustache curled nervously between his fingers.

"Mr. Hathaway, I *will* be frank with you. I know nothing of this blank affair, — blank it all! — but what I've told you. Your discovery may be a concidence, nothing more. But I *have* been influenced, sir, — influenced by one of the most perfect goddess-like — yes, sir; one of the most simple girlish creatures that God ever sent upon earth. A woman that I should be proud to claim as my daughter, a woman that would always be the superior of any man who dare aspire to be her husband! A young lady as peerless in her beauty as she is in her accomplish-

ments, and whose equal don't walk this planet ! I know, sir, *you* don't follow me; I know, Mr. Hathaway, your Puritan prejudices; your Church proclivities; your worldly sense of propriety; and, above all, sir, the blanked hypocritical Pharisaic doctrines of your party — I mean no offense to *you*, sir, personally — blind you to that girl's perfections. She, poor child, herself has seen it and felt it; but never, in her blameless innocence and purity, suspecting the cause. 'There is,' she said to me last night, confidentially, 'something strangely antagonistic and repellent in our natures, some undefined and nameless barrier between our ever understanding each other.' You comprehend, Mr. Hathaway, she does full justice to your intentions and your unquestioned abilities. 'I am not blind,' she said, 'to Mr. Hathaway's gifts, and it is very possible the fault lies with me.' Her very words, sir."

"Then you believe she is perfectly ignorant of her real mother?" asked Paul, with a steady voice, but a whitening face.

"As an unborn child," said the colonel emphatically. "The snow on the Sierras is not more spotlessly pure of any trace or contamination of the mining ditches than she of her mother and her past. The knowledge of it, the mere breath of suspicion of it, in her presence would be a profanation, sir! Look at her eye — open as the sky and as clear; look at her face and figure — as clean, sir, as a Blue Grass thoroughbred! Look at the way she carries herself, whether in those white frillings of her simple school-gown, or that black evening dress that makes her look like a princess! And, blank me, if she is n't one! There 's no poor stock there — no white trash — no mixed blood, sir. Blank it all, sir, if it comes to *that* — the Arguellos — if there 's a hound of them living — might go down on their knees to have their name borne by such a creature! By the Eternal, sir, if one of them dared to

cross her path with a word that was n't abject — yes, sir, *abject*, I 'd wipe his dust off the earth and send it back to his ancestors before he knew where he was, or my name is n't Harry Pendleton ! "

Hopeless and inconsistent as all this was, it was a wonderful sight to see the colonel, his dark stern face illuminated with a zealot's enthusiasm, his eyes on fire, the ends of his gray mustache curling around his set jaw, his head thrown back, his legs astride, and his gold-headed stick held in the hollow of his elbow, like a lance at rest ! Paul saw it, and knew that this Quixotic transformation was part of *her* triumph, and yet had a miserable consciousness that the charms of this Dulcinea del Toboso had scarcely been exaggerated. He turned his eyes away, and said quietly : —

" Then you don't think this coincidence will ever awaken any suspicion in regard to her real mother ? "

" Not in the least, sir — not in the least," said the colonel, yet, perhaps, with more doggedness than conviction of accent. " Nobody but yourself would ever notice that police report, and the connection of that woman's name with his was not notorious, or I should have known it."

" And you believe," continued Paul hopelessly, " that Miss Yerba's selection of the name was purely accidental ? "

" Purely — a schoolgirl's fancy. Fancy, did I say ? No, sir ; by Jove, an inspiration ! "

" And," continued Paul, almost mechanically, " you do not think it may be some insidious suggestion of an enemy who knew of this transient relation that no one suspected ? "

To his final amazement Pendleton's brow cleared ! " An enemy ? Gad ! you may be right. I 'll look into it ; and, if that is the case, which I scarcely dare hope for, Mr. Hathaway, you can safely leave him to *me*."

He looked so supremely confident in his fatuous heroism that Paul could say no more. He rose and, with a faint smile upon his pale face, held out his hand. "I think that is all I have to say. When you see Miss Yerba again, — as you will, no doubt, — you may tell her that I am conscious of no misunderstanding on my part, except, perhaps, as to the best way I could serve her, and that, but for what she has told *you*, I should certainly have carried away no remembrance of any misunderstanding of *hers*."

"Certainly," said the colonel, with cheerful philosophy, "I will carry your message with pleasure. You understand how it is, Mr. Hathaway. There is no accounting for these instincts — we can only accept them as they are. But I believe that your intentions, sir, were strictly according to what you conceived to be your duty. You won't take something before you go? Well, then — good-by."

Two weeks later Paul found among his morning letters an envelope addressed in Colonel Pendleton's boyish scrawling hand. He opened it with an eagerness that no studied self-control nor rigid preoccupation of his duties had yet been able to subdue, and glanced hurriedly at its contents: —

Dear Sir, — As I am on the point of sailing to Europe to-morrow to escort Miss Arguello and Miss Woods on an extended visit to England and the Continent, I am desirous of informing you that I have thus far been unable to find any foundation for the suggestions thrown out by you in our last interview. Miss Arguello's Spanish acquaintances have been very select, and limited to a few school friends and Don Cæsar and Doña Anna Briones, tried friends, who are also fellow passengers with us to Europe. Miss Arguello suggests that some political difference between you and Don Cæsar, which occurred during your visit to Rosario three months ago, may have, perhaps, given rise to your

supposition. She joins me in best wishes for your public career, which even in the distraction of foreign travel and the obligations of her position she will follow from time to time with the greatest interest.

Very respectfully yours,

HARRY PENDLETON.

CHAPTER V

It was on the 3d of August, 1863, that Paul Hathaway resigned himself and his luggage to the care of the gold-laced, ostensible porter of the Strudle Bad Hof, not without some uncertainty, in a land of uniforms, whether he would be eventually conducted to the barracks, the police office, or the Conservatoire. He was relieved when the omnibus drove into the courtyard of the Bad Hof, and the gold-chained chamberlain, flanked by two green tubs of oleanders, received him with a gravity calculated to check any preconceived idea he might have that traveling was a trifling affair, or that an arrival at the Bad Hof was not of serious moment. His letters had not yet arrived, for he had, in a fit of restlessness, shortened his route, and he strolled listlessly into the reading-room. Two or three English guests were evidently occupied in eminently respectable reading and writing; two were sitting by the window engaged in subdued but profitable conversation; and two Americans from Boston were contentedly imitating them on the other side of the room. A decent restraint, as of people who were not for a moment to be led into any foreign idea of social gayety at a watering-place, was visible everywhere. A spectacled Prussian officer in full uniform passed along the hall, halted for a moment at the doorway as if contemplating an armed invasion, thought better of it, and took his uniform away into the sunlight of the open square, where it was joined by other uniforms, and became by contrast a miracle of unbraced levity. Paul stood the Polar silence for a few moments, until one of the readers arose and, tak-

ing his book — a Murray — in his hand, walked slowly across the room to a companion, mutely pointed to a passage in the book, remained silent until the other had dumbly perused it, and then walked back again to his seat, having achieved the incident without a word. At which Paul, convinced of his own incongruity, softly withdrew with his hat in his hand, and his eyes fixed devotionally upon it.

It was good after that to get into the slanting sunlight and checkered linden shadows of the *Allée;* to see even a tightly jacketed cavalryman naturally walking with Clärchen and her two round-faced and drab-haired young charges; to watch the returning invalid procession, very real and very human, each individual intensely involved in the atmosphere of his own symptoms; and very good after that to turn into the Thiergarten, where the animals were, however, chiefly of his own species, and shamelessly and openly amusing themselves. It was pleasant to contrast it with his first visit to the place three months before, and correct his crude impressions. And it was still more pleasant suddenly to recognize, under the round flat cap of a general officer, a former traveler who was fond of talking with him about America with an intelligence and understanding of it that Paul had often missed among his own traveled countrymen. It was pleasant to hear his unaffected and simple greeting, to renew their old acquaintance, and to saunter back to the hotel together through the long twilight.

They were only a few squares from the hotel, when Paul's attention was attracted by the curiosity and delight of two or three children before him, who appeared to be following a quaint-looking figure that was evidently not unfamiliar to them. It appeared to be a servant in a striking livery of green with yellow facings and crested silver buttons, but still more remarkable for the indescribable mingling of jaunty ease and conscious dignity with which

he carried off his finery. There was something so singular and yet so vaguely reminiscent in his peculiar walk and the exaggerated swing of his light bamboo cane that Paul could not only understand the childish wonder of the passers-by, who turned to look after him, but was stirred with a deeper curiosity. He quickened his pace, but was unable to distinguish anything of the face or features of the stranger, except that his hair under his cocked hat appeared to be tightly curled and powdered. Paul's companion, who was amused at what seemed to be the American's national curiosity, had seen the figure before. "A servant in the suite of some Eastern *Altesse* visiting the baths. You will see stranger things, my friend, in the Strudle Bad. *Par example*, your own countrymen, too; the one who has enriched himself by that pork of Chicago, or that soap, or this candle, in a carriage with the crest of the title he has bought in Italy with his dollars, and his beautiful daughters, who are seeking more titles with possible matrimonial contingencies."

After an early dinner, Paul found his way to the little theatre. He had already been struck by a highly colored poster near the *Bahnhof*, purporting that a distinguished German company would give a representation of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and certain peculiarities in the pictorial advertisement of the tableaux gave promise of some entertainment. He found the theatre fairly full; there was the usual contingent of *abonnirte* officers, a fair sprinkling of English and German travelers, but apparently none of his own countrymen. He had no time to examine the house more closely, for the play, commencing with simple punctuality, not only far exceeded the promise of the posters, but of any previous performance of the play he had witnessed. Transported at once to a gorgeous tropical region — the slave States of America — resplendent with the fruits and palms of Mauritius, and peopled exclusively with Paul and

Virginia's companions in striped cotton, Hathaway managed to keep a composed face, until the arrival of the good Southern planter St. Clare as one of the earlier portraits of Goethe, in top boots, light kerseymere breeches, redingote and loose Byron collar, compelled him to shrink into the upper corner of the box with his handkerchief to his face. Luckily, the action passed as the natural effect upon a highly sympathetic nature of religious interviews between a round-faced flaxen-haired "Kleine Eva" and "Onkeel Tome," occasionally assisted by a Dissenting clergyman in Geneva bands; of excessive brutality with a cattle whip by a Zamiel-like Legree; of the sufferings of a runaway negro *Zimmermädchen* with a child three shades lighter than herself; and of a painted canvas "man-hunt," where apparently four well-known German composers on horseback, with flowing hair, top boots, and a *cor de chasse*, were pursuing, with the aid of a pack of foxhounds, "the much too deeply abused and yet spiritually elevated Onkeel Tome." Paul did not wait for the final apotheosis of "der Kleine Eva," but, in the silence of a hushed audience, made his way into the corridor and down the staircase. He was passing an open door marked "Direction," when his attention was sharply attracted by a small gathering around it and the sounds of indignant declamation. It was the voice of a countryman — more than that, it was a familiar voice, that he had not heard for three years — the voice of Colonel Harry Pendleton!

"Tell him," said Pendleton, in scathing tones, to some invisible interpreter, — "tell him, sir, that a more infamous caricature of the blankest caricature that ever maligned a free people, sir, I never before had the honor of witnessing. Tell him that *I*, sir — I, Harry Pendleton, of Kentucky, a Southerner, sir — an old slaveholder, sir, declare it to be a tissue of falsehoods unworthy the credence of a Christian civilization like this — unworthy the attention of

the distinguished ladies and gentlemen that are gathered here to-night. Tell him, sir, he has been imposed upon. Tell him I am responsible — give him my card and address — personally responsible for what I say. If he wants proofs — blank it all! — tell him you yourself have been a slave — *my* slave, sir! Take off your hat, sir! Ask him to look at you — ask him if he thinks you ever looked or could look like that lop-eared, psalm-singing, white-headed hypocrite on the stage! Ask him, sir, if he thinks that blank ringmaster they call St. Clare looks like *Me!*"

At this astounding exordium Paul eagerly pressed forward and entered the bureau. There certainly was Colonel Pendleton, in spotless evening dress; erect, flashing, and indignant; his aquiline nose lifted like a hawk's beak over his quarry, his iron-gray mustache, now white and waxed, parted like a swallow's tail over his handsome mouth, and between him and the astounded "Direction" stood the apparition of the *Allée* — George! There was no mistaking him now. What Paul had thought was a curled wig or powder was the old negro's own white knotted wool, and the astounding livery he wore was carried off as no one but George could carry it.

But he was still more amazed when the old servant, in a German as exaggerated, as incoherent, but still as fluent and persuasive as his own native speech, began an extravagant but perfectly dignified and diplomatic translation of his master's protest. Where and when, by what instinct, he had assimilated and made his own the grotesque inversions and ponderous sentimentalities of Teutonic phrasing, Paul could not guess; but it was with breathless wonder that he presently became aware that, so perfect and convincing was the old man's style and deportment, not only the simple officials but even the bystanders were profoundly impressed by this farrago of absurdity. A happy word here and there, the full title and rank given, even with a

slight exaggeration, to each individual, brought a deep and guttural "So!" from lips that would have found it difficult to repeat a line of his ceremonious idiocy.

In their preoccupation neither the colonel nor George had perceived Paul's entrance, but, as the old servant turned with magnificent courtesy towards the bystanders, his eyes fell upon Paul. A flash of surprise, triumph, and satisfaction lit up his rolling eyes. Paul instantly knew that he not only recognized him, but that he had already heard of and thoroughly appreciated a certain distinguished position that Paul had lately held, and was quick to apply it. Intensifying for a moment the grandiloquence of his manner, he called upon his master's most distinguished and happily arrived old friend, the Lord Lieutenant-Governor of the Golden Californias, to corroborate his statement. Colonel Pendleton started, and grasped Paul's hand warmly. Paul turned to the already half-mollified Director with the diplomatic suggestion that the vivid and realistic acting of the admirable company which he himself had witnessed had perhaps unduly excited his old friend, even as it had undoubtedly thrown into greater relief the usual exaggerations of dramatic representation, and the incident terminated with a profusion of apologies, and the most cordial expressions of international good feeling on both sides.

Yet, as they turned away from the theatre together, Paul could not help noticing that, although the colonel's first greeting had been spontaneous and unaffected, it was succeeded by an uneasy reserve. Paul made no attempt to break it, and confined himself to a few general inquiries, ending by inviting the colonel to sup with him at the hotel. Pendleton hesitated. "At any other time, Mr. Hathaway, I should have insisted upon you, as the stranger, supping with me; but since the absence of — of — the rest of my party — I have given up my suite of rooms at the Bad Hof, and have taken smaller lodgings for myself and the boy at

the Schwartze Adler. Miss Woods and Miss Arguello have accepted an invitation to spend a few days at the villa of the Baron and Baroness von Schilprecht — an hour or two from here." He lingered over the title with an odd mingling of impressiveness and inquiry, and glanced at Paul. But Hathaway exhibiting neither emotion nor surprise at the mention of Yerba's name or the title of her host, he continued, "Miss Arguello, I suppose you know, is immensely admired: she has been, sir, the acknowledged belle of Strudle Bad."

"I can readily believe it," said Paul simply.

"And has taken the position — the position, sir, to which she is entitled."

Without appearing to notice the slight challenge in Pendleton's tone, Paul returned, "I am glad to hear it. The more particularly as, I believe, the Germans are great sticklers for position and pedigree."

"You are right, sir — quite right: they are," said the colonel proudly — "although" — with a certain premeditated deliberation — "I have been credibly informed that the King can, in certain cases, if he chooses, supply — yes, sir — *supply* a favored person with ancestors — yes, sir, with *ancestors!*"

Paul cast a quick glance at his companion.

"Yes, sir — that is, we will say, in the case of a lady of inferior rank — or even birth, the King of these parts can, on her marriage with a nobleman — blank it all! — ennoble her father and mother, and their fathers and mothers, though they 've been dead, or as good as dead, for years."

"I am afraid that 's a slight exaggeration of the rare custom of granting 'noble lands,' or estates that carry hereditary titles with them," said Paul more emphatically, perhaps, than the occasion demanded.

"Fact, sir — George there knows it all," said Pendleton. "He gets it from the other servants. I don't speak the language, sir, but *he* does. Picked it up in a year."

"I must compliment him on his fluency, certainly," said Paul, looking at George.

The old servant smiled, and not without a certain condescension. "Yes, sah; I don' say to a scholar like yo'-self, sah, dat I 'se got de grandmatical presichion; but as fah, sah — as fah as de *idiotisms* ob de language goes. Sah — it 's gen'lly allowed I 'm dar! As to what Marse Harry says ob de ignobling ob predecessors, I 've had it, sah, from de best autority, sah — de furst, I may say, sah — de real *prima facie* men — de gemplum ob his Serene Highness, in de korse eb ordinary conversashun, sah."

"That 'll do, George," said Pendleton, with paternal brusqueness. "Run on ahead and tell that blank chamberlain that Mr. Hathaway is one of my friends — and have supper accordingly." As the negro hastened away he turned to Paul: "What he says is true: he 's the most popular man or boy in all Strudle Bad — a devilish sight more than his master — and goes anywhere where *I* can't go. Princes and princesses stop and talk to him in the street; the Grand Duke asked permission to have him up in his carriage at the races the other day; and, by the Eternal, sir, he gives the style to all the flunkies in town!"

"And I see, he dresses the character," observed Paul.

"His own idea — entirely. And, by Jove! he proves to be right. You can't do anything here without a uniform. And they tell me he 's got everything correct, down to the crest on the buttons."

They walked on in silence for a few moments, Pendleton retaining a certain rigidity of step and bearing which Paul had come to recognize as indicating some uneasiness or mental disturbance on his part. Hathaway had no intention of precipitating the confidence of his companion. Perhaps experience had told him it would come soon enough. So he spoke carelessly of himself. How the need of a year's relaxation and change had brought him

abroad, his journeyings, and, finally, how he had been advised by his German physician to spend a few weeks at Strudle Bad preparatory to the voyage home. Yet he was perfectly aware that the colonel from time to time cast a furtive glance at his face. "And *you*," he said in conclusion — "when do you intend to return to California?"

The colonel hesitated slightly. "I shall remain in Europe until Miss Arguello is — settled — I mean," he added hurriedly, "until she has — ahem! — completed her education in foreign ways and customs. You see, Hathaway, I have constituted myself, after a certain fashion, I may say — still, her guardian. I am an old man, with neither kith nor kin myself, sir — I 'm a little too old-fashioned for the boys over there" — with a vague gesture towards the west, which, however, told Paul how near it still was to him. "But then, among the old fogies here — blank it all! — it is n't noticed. So I look after her, you see, or rather make myself responsible for her generally — although, of course, she has other friends and associates, you understand, more of her own age and tastes."

"And I 've no doubt she 's perfectly satisfied," said Paul in a tone of conviction.

"Well, yes, sir, I presume so," said the colonel slowly; "but I 've sometimes thought, Mr. Hathaway, that it would have been better if she 'd have had a woman's care — the protection, you understand, of an elderly woman of society. That seems to be the style here, you know — a chaperon, they call it. Now, Milly Woods, you see, is about the same age, and the Doña Anna, of course, is older, but — blank it! —she 's as big a flirt as the rest — I mean," he added, correcting himself sharply, "she lacks balance, sir, and — what shall I call it? — self-abnegation."

"Then Doña Anna is still of your party?" asked Paul.

"She is, sir, and her brother, Don Cæsar. I have thought it advisable, on Yerba's account, to keep up as

much as possible the suggestion of her Spanish relationship — although by reason of their absurd ignorance of geography and political divisions out here, there is a prevailing impression that she is a South American. A fact, sir. I have myself been mistaken for the Dictator of one of these infernal Republics, and I have been pointed out as ruling over a million or two of niggers like George!"

There was no trace of any conception of humor in the colonel's face, although he uttered a short laugh, as if in polite acceptance of the possibility that Paul might have one. Far from that, his companion, looking at the striking profile and erect figure at his side, — at the long white mustache which drooped from his dark cheeks, and remembering his own sensations at first seeing George, — thought the popular belief not so wonderful. He was even forced to admit that the perfect unconsciousness on the part of master and man of any incongruity or peculiarity in themselves assisted the public misconception. And it was, I fear, with a feeling of wicked delight that, on entering the hotel, he hailed the evident consternation of those correct fellow countrymen from whom he had lately fled, at what they apparently regarded as a national scandal. He overheard their hurried assurance to their English friends that his companions were *not* from Boston, and enjoyed their mortification that this explanation did not seem to detract from the interest and relief with which the Britons surveyed them, or the open admiration of the Germans.

Although Pendleton somewhat unbent during supper, he did not allude to the secret of Yerba's parentage, nor of any tardy confidence of hers. To all appearance the situation remained as it was three years ago. He spoke of her great popularity as an heiress and a beautiful woman, and the marked attentions she received. He doubted not that she had rejected very distinguished offers, but she kept that to herself. She was perfectly competent to do so. She was

no giddy girl, to be flattered or deceived; on the contrary, he had never known a cooler or more sensible woman. She knew her own worth. When she met the man who satisfied her ambition and understanding, she would marry, and not before. He did not know what that ambition was; it was something exalted, of course. He could only say, of his own knowledge, that last year, when they were on the Italian lakes, there was a certain prince — Mr. Hathaway would understand why he did not mention names — who was not only attentive to her, but attentive to *him*, sir, by Jove! and most significant in his inquiries. It was the only occasion when he, the colonel, had ever spoken to her on such subjects; and, knowing that she was not indifferent to the fellow, who was not bad of his kind, he had asked her why she had not encouraged his suit. She had said, with a laugh, that he could n't marry her unless he gave up his claim of succession to a certain reigning house; and she would n't accept him *without it*. Those were her words, sir, and he could only say that the prince left a few days afterwards, and they had never seen him since. As to the princelings and counts and barons, she knew to a day the date of their patents of nobility, and what privileges they were entitled to; she could tell to a dot the value of their estates, the amount of their debts, and, by Jove! sir, the amount of mortgages she was expected to pay off before she married them. She knew the amount of income she had to bring to the Prussian Army, from the general to the lieutenant. She understood her own value and her rights. There was a young English lordling she met on the Rhine, whose boyish ways and simplicity seemed to please her. They were great friends; but he wanted him — the colonel — to induce her to accept an invitation for both to visit his mother's home in England, that his people might see her. But she declined, sir! She declined to pass in review before his mother. She said it was for *him* to pass in review before *her* mother.

"Did she say that?" interrupted Paul, fixing his bright eyes upon the colonel.

"If she had one, if she had one," corrected the colonel hastily. "Of course it was only an illustration. That she is an orphan is generally known, sir."

There was a dead silence for a few moments. The colonel leaned back in his chair and pulled his mustache. Paul turned away his eyes, and seemed absorbed in reflection. After a moment the colonel coughed, pushed aside his glass, and, leaning across the table, said, "I have a favor to ask of you, Mr. Hathaway."

There was such a singular change in the tone of his voice, an unexpected relaxation of some artificial tension, — a relaxation which struck Paul so pathetically as being as much physical as mental, as if he had suddenly been overtaken in some exertion by the weakness of age, — that he looked up quickly. Certainly, although still erect and lightly grasping his mustache, the colonel looked older.

"By all means, my dear colonel," said Paul warmly.

"During the time you remain here you can hardly help meeting Miss Arguello, perhaps frequently. It would be strange if you did not; it would appear to everybody still stranger. Give me your word as a gentleman that you will not make the least allusion to her of the past — nor reopen the subject."

Paul looked fixedly at the colonel. "I certainly had no intention of doing so," he said, after a pause, "for I thought it was already settled by you beyond disturbance or discussion. But do I understand you, that *she* has shown any uneasiness regarding it? From what you have just told me of her plans and ambition, I can scarcely imagine that she has any suspicion of the real facts."

"Certainly not," said the colonel hurriedly. "But I have your promise?"

"I promise you," said Paul, after a pause, "that I shall

neither introduce nor refer to the subject myself, and that if *she* should question me again regarding it, which is hardly possible, I will reveal nothing without your consent."

"Thank you," said Pendleton, without, however, exhibiting much relief in his face. "She will return here to-morrow."

"I thought you said she was absent for some days," said Paul.

"Yes; but she is coming back to say good-by to Doña Anna, who arrives here with her brother the same day, on their way to Paris."

It flashed through Paul's mind that the last time he had seen her was in the company of the Briones. It was not a pleasant coincidence. Yet he was not aware that it had affected him, until he saw the colonel watching him.

"I believe you don't fancy the brother," said Pendleton.

For an instant Paul was strongly tempted to avow his old vague suspicions of Don Cæsar, but the utter hopelessness of reopening the whole subject again, and his recollection of the passage in Pendleton's letter that purported to be Yerba's own theory of his dislike, checked him in time. He only said, "I don't remember whether I had any cause for disliking Don Cæsar; I can tell better when I see him again," and changed the subject. A few moments later the colonel summoned George from some lower region of the hotel, and rose to take his leave. "Miss Arguello, with her maid and courier, will occupy her old suite of rooms here," he remarked, with a return of his old imperiousness. "George has given the orders for her. *I* shall not change my present lodgings, but of course will call every day. Good-night!"

CHAPTER VI

The next morning Paul could not help noticing an increased and even exaggerated respect paid him by the hotel attendants. He was asked if his *Excellency* would be served with breakfast in a private room, and his condescension in selecting the public coffee-room struck the obsequious chamberlain, but did not prevent him from preceding Paul backwards to the table, and summoning a waiter to attend specially upon "milor." Surmising that George and the colonel might be in some way connected with this extravagance, he postponed an investigation till he should have seen them again. And, although he hardly dared to confess it to himself, the unexpected prospect of meeting Yerba again fully preoccupied his thoughts. He had believed that he would eventually see her in Europe, in some vague and indefinite way and hour: it had been in his mind when he started from California. That it would be so soon, and in such a simple and natural manner, he had never conceived.

He had returned from his morning walk to the *Brunnen*, and was sitting idly in his room, when there was a knock at the door. It opened to a servant bearing a salver with a card. Paul lifted it with a slight tremor, not at the engraved name of "Maria Concepcion de Arguello de la Yerba Buena," but at the remembered schoolgirl hand that had penciled underneath the words, "wishes the favor of an audience with his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant-Governor of the Californias."

Paul looked inquiringly at the servant. "The *gnädige Fräulein* was in her own salon. Would *Excellency* walk

that way? It was but a step; in effect, the next apartment."

Paul followed him into the hall with wondering steps. The door of the next room was open, and disclosed a handsomely furnished salon. A tall graceful figure rose quickly from behind a writing-table, and advanced with outstretched hands and a frank yet mischievous smile. It was Yerba.

Standing there in a grayish hat, mantle, and traveling dress, all of one subdued yet alluring tone, she looked as beautiful as when he had last seen her — and yet — unlike. For a brief bitter moment his instincts revolted at this familiar yielding up in his fair countrywomen of all that was distinctively original in them to alien tastes and habits, and he resented the plastic yet characterless mobility which made Yerba's Parisian dress and European manner fit her so charmingly and yet express so little. For a brief critical moment he remembered the placid, unchanging simplicity of German, and the inflexible and ingrained reserve of English, girlhood, in opposition to this indistinctive cosmopolitan grace. But only for a moment. As soon as she spoke, a certain flavor of individuality seemed to return to her speech.

"Confess," she said, "it was a courageous thing for me to do. You might have been somebody else — a real Excellency — or Heaven knows what! Or, what is worse in your new magnificence, you might have forgotten one of your oldest, most humble, but faithful subjects." She drew back and made him a mock ceremonious curtsy, that even in its charming exaggeration suggested to Paul, however, that she had already made it somewhere seriously.

"But what does it all mean?" he asked, smiling, feeling not only his doubts and uneasiness vanish, but even the years of separation melt away in her presence. "I know I went to bed last night a very humble individual, and yet I seem to awaken this morning a very exalted personage.

Am I really Commander of the Faithful, or am I dreaming? Might I trouble you, as my predecessor Abou Hassan did Sweetlips, to bite my little finger?"

"Do you mean to say you have not seen the 'Anzeiger'?" she returned, taking a small German printed sheet from the table and pointing to a paragraph. Paul took the paper. Certainly there was the plain announcement among the arrivals of "His Excellency Paul Hathaway, Lord Lieutenant-Governor of the Californias." A light flashed upon him.

"This is George's work. He and Colonel Pendleton were here with me last night."

"Then you have seen the colonel already?" she said, with a scarcely perceptible alteration of expression, which, however, struck Paul.

"Yes. I met him at the theatre last evening." He was about to plunge into an animated description of the colonel's indignation, but checked himself, he knew not why. But he was thankful the next moment that he had.

"That accounts for everything," she said, lifting her pretty shoulders with a slight shrug of weariness. "I had to put a stop to George's talking about *me* three months ago, — his extravagance is something *too* awful. And the colonel, who is completely in his hands, — trusting him for everything, even the language, — does n't see it."

"But he is extravagant in the praise of his friends only, and you certainly justify all he can say."

She was taking off her hat, and stopped for a moment to look at him thoughtfully, with the soft tendrils of her hair clinging to her forehead. "Did the colonel talk much about me?"

"A great deal. In fact, I think we talked of nothing else. He has told me of your triumphs and your victims; of your various campaigns and your conquests. And yet I dare say he has not told me all — and I am dying to hear more."

She had laid down her hat and unloosed a large bow of her mantle, but stopped suddenly in the midst of it and sat down again.

"I wish you 'd do something for me."

"You have only to name it."

"Well, drop all this kind of talk! Try to think of me as if I had just come from California — or, better, as if you had never known anything of me at all — and we met for the first time. You could, I dare say, make yourself very agreeable to such a young lady who was willing to be pleased — why not to me? I venture to say you have not ever troubled yourself about me since we last met. No — hear me through — why, then, should you wish to talk over what did n't concern you at the time? Promise me you will stop this reminiscent gossip, and I promise you *I* will not only not bore you with it, but take care that it is not intruded upon you by others. Make yourself pleasant to me by talking about yourself and your prospects, — anything but *me*, — and I will throw over those princes and barons that the colonel has raved about, and devote myself to you while you are here. Does that suit your Excellency?" She had crossed her knees, and, with her hands clasped over them, and the toe of her small boot advanced beyond her skirt, leaned forward in the attitude he remembered to have seen her take in the summer-house at Rosario.

"Perfectly," he said.

"How long will you be here?"

"About three weeks: that, I believe, is the time allotted for my cure."

"Are you really ill," she said quietly, "or imagine yourself so?"

"It amounts to about the same thing. But my cure may not take so long," he added, fixing his bright eyes upon her.

She returned his gaze thoughtfully, and they remained looking at each other silently.

"Then you are stronger than you give yourself credit for. That is very often the case," she said quietly. "There," she added in another tone, "it is settled. You will come and go as you like, using this salon as your own. Stay, we can do something to-day. What do you say to a ride in the forest this afternoon? Milly is n't here yet, but it will be quite proper for you to accompany me on horseback, though, of course, we could n't walk a hundred yards down the *Allée* together unless we were *verlobt.*"

"But," said Paul, "you are expecting company this afternoon. Don Cæsar — I mean Miss Briones and her brother are coming here to say good-by."

She regarded him curiously, but without emotion.

"Colonel Pendleton should have added that they were to remain here over night as my guests," she said composedly. "And of course we shall be back in time for dinner. But that is nothing to you. You have only to be ready at three o'clock. I will see that the horses are ordered. I often ride here, and the people know my tastes and habits. We will have a pleasant ride and a good long talk together, and I 'll show you a ruin and a distant view of the villa where I have been staying." She held out her hand with a frank girlish smile, and even a girlish anticipation of pleasure in her brown eyes. He bent over her slim fingers for a moment, and withdrew.

When he was in his own room again, he was conscious only of a strong desire to avoid the colonel until after his ride with Yerba. He would keep his word so far as to abstain from allusion to her family or her past: indeed, he had his own opinion of its futility. But it would be strange if, with his past experience, he could not find some other way to determine her convictions or win her confidence during those two hours of companionship. He would accept

her terms fairly; if she had any ulterior design in her advances, he would detect it; if she had the least concern for him, she could not continue long an artificial friendship. But he must not think of that!

By absenting himself from the hotel he managed to keep clear of Pendleton until the hour arrived. He was gratified to find Yerba in the simplest and most sensible of habits, as if she had already divined his tastes and had wished to avoid attracting undue attention. Nevertheless, it very prettily accented her tall graceful figure, and Paul, albeit, like most artistic admirers of the sex, not recognizing a woman on a horse as a particularly harmonious spectacle, was forced to admire her. Both rode well, and naturally — having been brought up in the same Western school — the horses recognized it, and instinctively obeyed them, and their conversation had the easy deliberation and inflection of a *tête-à-tête*. Paul, in view of her previous hint, talked to her of himself and his fortunes, of which she appeared, however, to have some knowledge. His health had obliged him lately to abandon politics and office; he had been successful in some ventures, and had become a junior partner in a bank with foreign correspondence. She listened to him for some time with interest and attention, but at last her face became abstracted and thoughtful. "I wish I were a man!" she said suddenly.

Paul looked at her quickly. For the first time he detected in the ring of her voice something of the passionate quality he fancied he had always seen in her face.

"Except that it might give you better control of your horse, I don't see why," said Paul. "And I don't entirely believe you."

"Why?"

"Because no woman really wishes to be a man unless she is conscious of her failure as a woman."

"And how do you know I'm not?" she said, checking

her horse and looking in his face. A quick conviction that she was on the point of some confession sprang into his mind, but unfortunately showed in his face. She beat back his eager look with a short laugh. "There, don't speak, and don't look like that. That remark was worthy the usual artless maiden's invitation to a compliment, was n't it? Let us keep to the subject of yourself. Why, with your political influence, don't you get yourself appointed to some diplomatic position over here?"

"There are none in our service. You would n't want me to sink myself in some absurd social functions, which are called by that name, merely to become the envy and hatred of a few rich republicans, like your friends who haunt foreign courts?"

"That 's not a pretty speech — but I suppose I invited *that* too. Don't apologize. I 'd rather see you flare out like that than pay compliments. Yet I fancy you 're a diplomatist, for all that."

"You did me the honor to believe I was one once, when I was simply the most palpable ass and bungler living," said Paul bitterly.

She was still sweetly silent, apparently preoccupied in smoothing out the mane of her walking horse. "Did I?" she said softly. He drew close beside her.

"How different the vegetation is here from what it is with us!" she said, with nervous quickness, directing his attention to the grass road beneath them, without lifting her eyes. "I don't mean what is cultivated, — for I suppose it takes centuries to make the lawns they have in England, — but even here the blades of grass seem to press closer together, as if they were crowded or over-populated, like the country; and this forest, which has been always wild and was a hunting park, has a *blasé* look, as if it was already tired of the unchanging traditions and monotony around it. I think over there Nature affects and influences us: here, I fancy, it is itself affected by the people."

"I think a good deal of Nature comes over from America for that purpose," he said dryly.

"And I think you are breaking your promise — besides being a goose!" she retorted smartly. Nevertheless, for some occult reason they both seemed relieved by this exquisite witticism, and trotted on amicably together. When Paul lifted his eyes to hers he could see that they were suffused with a tender mischief, as of a reproving yet secretly admiring sister, and her strangely delicate complexion had taken on itself that faint Alpine glow that was more of an illumination than a color. "There," she said gayly, pointing with her whip as the wood opened upon a glade through which the parted trees showed a long blue curvature of distant hills, "you see that white thing lying like a snowdrift on the hills?"

"Or the family washing on a hedge."

"As you please. Well, that is the villa."

"And you were very happy there?" said Paul, watching her girlishly animated face.

"Yes; and as you don't ask questions, I 'll tell you why. There is one of the sweetest old ladies there that I ever met — the perfection of old-time courtliness with all the motherishness of a German woman. She was very kind to me, and, as she had no daughter of her own, I think she treated me as if I was one. At least, I can imagine how one would feel to her, and what a woman like that could make of any girl. You laugh, Mr. Hathaway, you don't understand — but you don't know what an advantage it would be to a girl to have a mother like that, and know that she could fall back on her and hold her own against anybody. She 's equipped from the start, instead of being handicapped. It 's all very well to talk about the value of money. It can give you everything but one thing — the power to do without it."

"I think its purchasing value would include even the

gnädige Frau," said Paul, who had laughed only to hide the uneasiness that Yerba's approach to the tabooed subject had revived in him. She shook her head; then, recovering her tone of gentle banter, said, "There — I 've made a confession. If the colonel talks to you again about my conquests, you will know that at present my affections are centred on the baron's mother. I admit it 's a strong point in his — in *anybody's* — favor, who can show an unblemished maternal pedigree. What a pity it is you are an orphan, like myself, Mr. Hathaway! For I fancy your mother must have been a very perfect woman. A great deal of her tact and propriety has descended to you. Only it would have been nicer if she had given it to you like pocket money, as occasion required — which you might have shared with me — than leaving it to you in one thumping legacy."

It was impossible to tell how far the playfulness of her brown eyes suggested any ulterior meaning, for as Paul again eagerly drew towards her, she sent her horse into a rapid canter before him. When he was at her side again, she said, "There is still the ruin to see on our way home. It is just off here to the right. But if you wish to go over it we will have to dismount at the foot of the slope and walk up. It has n't any story or legend that I know of; I looked over the guide-book to cram for it before you came, but there was nothing. So you can invent what you like."

They dismounted at the beginning of a gentle acclivity, where an ancient wagon-road, now grass-grown, rose smooth as a glacis. Tying their horses to two moplike bushes, they climbed the slope hand in hand like children. There were a few winding broken steps, part of a fallen archway, a few feet of vaulted corridor, a sudden breach — the sky beyond — and that was all! Not all; for before them, overlooked at first, lay a chasm covering half an acre, in which the whole of the original edifice — tower, turrets, walls, and battlements — had been apparently cast, inextricably mixed

and mingled at different depths and angles, with here and there, like mushrooms from a dust-heap, a score of trees upspringing.

"This is not Time — but gunpowder," said Paul, leaning over a parapet of the wall and gazing at the abyss, with a slight grimace.

"It don't look very romantic, certainly," said Yerba. "I only saw it from the road before. I 'm dreadfully sorry," she added, with mock penitence. "I suppose, however, *something* must have happened here."

"There may have been nobody ir the house at the time," said Paul gravely. "The family may have been at the baths."

They stood close together, their elbows resting upon the broken wall, and almost touching. Beyond the abyss and darker forest they could see the more vivid green and regular lines of the plane-trees of Strudle Bad, the glitter of a spire, or the flash of a dome. From the abyss itself arose a cool odor of moist green leaves, the scent of some unseen blossoms, and around the baking vines on the hot wall the hum of apparently taskless and disappointed bees. There was nobody in sight in the forest road, no one working in the bordering fields, and no suggestion of the present. There might have been three or four centuries between them and Strudle Bad.

"The legend of this place," said Paul, glancing at the long brown lashes and oval outline of the cheek so near his own, "is simple, yet affecting. A cruel, remorseless, but fascinating Hexie was once loved by a simple shepherd. He had never dared to syllable his hopeless affection, or claim from her a syllabled — perhaps I should say a one-syllabled — reply. He had followed her from remote lands, dumbly worshiping her, building in his foolish brain an air-castle of happiness, which by reason of her magic power she could always see plainly in his eyes. And one day,

beguiling him in the depths of the forest, she led him to a fair-seeming castle, and, bidding him enter its portals, offered to show him a realization of his dream. But, lo! even as he entered the stately corridor it seemed to crumble away before him, and disclosed a hideous abyss beyond, in which the whole of that goodly palace lay in heaped and tangled ruins — the fitting symbol of his wrecked and shattered hopes."

She drew back a little way from him, but still holding on to the top of the broken wall with one slim gauntleted hand, and swung herself to one side, while she surveyed him with smiling, parted lips and conscious eyelids. He promptly covered her hand with his own, but she did not seem to notice it.

"That is not the story," she said in a faint voice that even her struggling sauciness could not make steadier. "The true story is called 'The Legend of the Goose-Girl of Strudle Bad, and the enterprising Gosling.' There was once a goose-girl of the plain who tried honestly to drive her geese to market, but one eccentric and willful gosling — Mr. Hathaway! Stop — please — I beg you let me go!"

He had caught her in his arms — the one encircling her waist, the other hand still grasping hers. She struggled, half laughing; yielded for a breathless moment as his lips brushed her cheek, and — threw him off. "There!" she said, "that will do: the story was not illustrated."

"But Yerba," he said, with passionate eagerness, "hear me — it is all God's truth. — I love you!"

She drew back farther, shaking the dust of the wall from the folds of her habit. Then, with a lower voice and a paler cheek, as if his lips had sent her blood and utterance back to her heart, she said, "Come, let us go."

"But not until you 've heard me, Yerba."

"Well, then — I believe you — there!" she said, looking at him.

"You believe me?" he repeated eagerly, attempting to take her hand again.

She drew back still further. "Yes," she said, "or I should n't be here now. There! that must suffice you. And if you wish me still to believe you, you will not speak of this again while we are out together. Come, let us go back to the horses."

He looked at her with all his soul. She was pale, but composed, and — he could see — determined. He followed her without a word. She accepted his hand to support her again down the slope without embarrassment or reminiscent emotion. The whole scene through which she had just passed might have been buried in the abyss and ruins behind her. As she placed her foot in his hand to remount, and for a moment rested her weight on his shoulder, her brown eyes met his frankly and without a tremor.

Nor was she content with this. As Paul at first rode on silently, his heart filled with unsatisfied yearning, she rallied him mischievously. Was it kind in him on this, their first day together, to sulk in this fashion? Was it a promise for their future excursions? Did he intend to carry this lugubrious visage through the *Allée* and up to the courtyard of the hotel to proclaim his sentimental condition to the world? At least, she trusted he would not show it to Milly, who might remember that this was only the *second time* they had met each other. There was something so sweetly reasonable in this, and withal not without a certain hopefulness for the future, to say nothing of the half-mischievous, half-reproachful smile that accompanied it, that Paul exerted himself, and eventually recovered his lost gayety. When they at last drew up in the courtyard, with the flush of youth and exercise in their faces, Paul felt he was the object of envy to the loungers, and of fresh gossip to Strudle Bad. It struck him less pleasantly that two dark faces, which had been previously regarding him in the

gloom of the corridor and vanished as he approached, reappeared some moments later in Yerba's salon as Don Cæsar and Doña Anna, with a benignly different expression. Doña Anna especially greeted him with so much of the ostentatious archness of a confident and forgiving woman to a momentarily recreant lover, that he felt absurdly embarrassed in Yerba's presence. He was thinking how he could excuse himself, when he noticed a beautiful basket of flowers on the table and a tiny note bearing a baron's crest. Yerba had put it aside with — as it seemed to him at the moment — an almost too pronounced indifference — and an indifference that was strongly contrasted to Doña Anna's eagerly expressed enthusiasm over the offering, and her ultimate supplications to Paul and her brother to admire its beauties and the wonderful taste of the donor.

All this seemed so incongruous with Paul's feelings, and above all with the recollection of his scene with Yerba, that he excused himself from dining with the party, alleging an engagement with his old fellow traveler, the German officer, whose acquaintance he had renewed. Yerba did not press him; he even fancied she looked relieved. Colonel Pendleton was coming; Paul was not loath, in his present frame of mind, to dispense with his company. A conviction that the colonel's counsel was not the best guide for Yerba, and that in some vague way their interests were antagonistic, had begun to force itself upon him. He had no intention of being disloyal to her old guardian, but he felt that Pendleton had not been frank with him since his return from Rosario. Had he ever been so with *her?* He sometimes doubted his disclaimer.

He was lucky in finding the general disengaged, and together they dined at a restaurant and spent the evening at the *Kursaal.* Later, at the Residenz Club, the general leaned over his beer-glass and smilingly addressed his companion.

"So I hear you, too, are a conquest of the beautiful South American."

For an instant Paul, recognizing only Doña Anna under that epithet, looked puzzled.

"Come, my friend," said the general, regarding him with some amusement, "I am an older man than you, yet I hardly think I could have ridden out with such a goddess without becoming her slave."

Paul felt his face flush in spite of himself. "Ah! you mean Miss Arguello," he said hurriedly, his color increasing at his own mention of that name as if he were imposing it upon his honest companion. "She is an old acquaintance of mine — from my own State — California."

"Ah, so," said the general, lifting his eyebrows in profound apology. "A thousand pardons."

"Surely," said Paul, with a desperate attempt to recover his equanimity, "*you* ought to know our geography better."

"So, I am wrong. But still the name — Arguello — surely that is not American? Still, they say she has no accent, and does not look like a Mexican."

For an instant Paul was superstitiously struck with the fatal infelicity of Yerba's selection of a foreign name, that now seemed only to invite that comment and criticism which she should have avoided. Nor could he explain it at length to the general without assisting and accenting the deception, which he was always hoping in some vague way to bring to an end. He was sorry he had corrected the general; he was furious that he had allowed himself to be confused.

Happily his companion had misinterpreted his annoyance, and with impulsive German friendship threw himself into what he believed to be Paul's feelings. "*Donnerwetter!* Your beautiful countrywoman is made the subject of curiosity just because that stupid baron is persistent in his serious attentions. That is quite enough, my good friend,

to make *Klatschen* here among those animals who do not understand the freedom of an American girl, or that an heiress may have something else to do with her money than to expend it on the baron's mortgages. But" — he stopped, and his simple, honest face assumed an air of profound and sagacious cunning — "I am glad to talk about it with you, who of course are perfectly familiar with the affair. I shall now be able to know what to say. My word, my friend, has some weight here, and I shall use it. And now you shall tell me *who* is our lovely friend, and *who* were her parents and her kindred in her own home. Her associates here, you possibly know, are an impossible colonel and his never-before-approached valet, with some South American Indian planters, and, I believe, a pork-butcher's daughter. But of *them* — it makes nothing. Tell me of *her* people."

With his kindly serious face within a few inches of Paul's, and sympathizing curiosity beaming from his pince-nez, he obliged the wretched and conscience-stricken Hathaway to respond with a detailed account of Yerba's parentage as projected by herself and indorsed by Colonel Pendleton. He dwelt somewhat particularly on the romantic character of the Trust, hoping to draw the general's attention away from the question of relationship, but he was chagrined to find that the honest warrior evidently confounded the Trust with some eleemosynary institution and sympathetically glossed it over. "Of course," he said, "the Mexican Minister at Berlin would know all about the Arguello family: so there would be no question there."

Paul was not sorry when the time came to take leave of his friend; but once again in the clear moonlight and fresh, balmy air of the *Allée*, he forgot the unpleasantness of the interview. He found himself thinking only of his ride with Yerba. Well! he had told her that he loved her She knew it now, and although she had forbidden him to speak further, she had not wholly rejected it. It must be her

morbid consciousness of the mystery of her birth that withheld a return of her affections, — some half-knowledge, perhaps, that she would not divulge, yet that kept her unduly sensitive of accepting his love. He was satisfied there was no entanglement; her heart was virgin. He even dared to hope that she had *always* cared for him. It was for *him* to remove all obstacles — to prevail upon her to leave this place and return to America with him as her husband, the guardian of her good name, and the custodian of her secret. At times the strains of a dreamy German waltz, played in the distance, brought back to him the brief moment that his arm had encircled her waist by the crumbling wall, and his pulses grew languid, only to leap firmer the next moment with more desperate resolve. He would win her, come what may! He could never have been in earnest before: he loathed and hated himself for his previous passive acquiescence to her fate. He had been a weak tool of the colonel's from the first: he was even now handicapped by a preposterous promise he had given him! Yes, she was right to hesitate — to question his ability to make her happy! He had found her here, surrounded by stupidity and cupidity — to give it no other name — so patent that she was the common gossip, and had offered nothing but a boyish declaration! As he strode into the hotel that night it was well that he did not meet the unfortunate colonel on the staircase!

It was very late, although there was still visible a light in Yerba's salon, shining on her balcony, which extended before and included his own window. From time to time he could hear the murmur of voices. It was too late to avail himself of the invitation to join them, even if his frame of mind had permitted it. He was too nervous and excited to go to bed, and, without lighting his candle, he opened the French window that gave upon the balcony, drew a chair in the recess behind the curtain, and gazed

upon the night. It was very quiet; the moon was high, the square was sleeping in a trance of checkered shadows, like a gigantic chessboard, with black foreshortened trees for pawns. The click of a cavalry sabre, the sound of a footfall on the pavement of the distant Königsstrasse, were distinctly audible; a far-off railway whistle was startling in its abruptness. In the midst of this calm the opening of the door of the salon, with the sudden uplifting of voices in the hall, told Paul that Yerba's guests were leaving. He heard Doña Anna's arch accents — arch even to Colonel Pendleton's monotonous baritone! — Milly's high, rapid utterances, the suave falsetto of Don Cæsar, and *her* voice, he thought a trifle wearied, — the sound of retiring footsteps, and all was still again.

So still that the rhythmic beat of the distant waltz returned to him, with a distinctiveness that he could idly follow. He thought of Rosario and the rose-breath of the open windows with a strange longing, and remembered the half-stifled sweetness of her happy voice rising with it from the veranda. Why had he ever let it pass from him then and waft its fragrance elsewhere? Why — What was that?

The slight turning of a latch! The creaking of the French window of the salon, and somebody had slipped softly half out on the balcony. His heart stopped beating. From his position in the recess of his own window, with his back to the partition of the salon, he could see nothing. Yet he did not dare to move. For with the quickened senses of a lover he felt the diffused and perfumed aura of *her* presence, of *her* garments, of *her* flesh, flow in upon him through the open window, and possess his whole breathless being! It was *she!* Like him, perhaps, longing to enjoy the perfect night — like him, perhaps, thinking of —

"So you ar-range to get rid of me — ha! lik thees? To

tur-rn me off from your heels like a dog who have follow you — but without a word — without a — a — thanks — without a 'ope! Ah! — we have ser-rved you — me and my sister; we are the or-range dry — now we can go! Like the old shoe, we are to be flung away! Good! But I am here again — you see. I shall speak, and you shall hear-r."

Don Cæsar's voice — alone with her! Paul gripped his chair and sat upright.

"Stop! Stay where you are! How dared you return here?" It was Yerba's voice, on the balcony, low and distinct.

"Shut the window! I shall speak with you what you will not the world to hear."

"I prefer to keep where I am, since you have crept into this room like a thief!"

"A thief! Good!" He broke out in Spanish, and, as if no longer fearful of being overheard, had evidently drawn nearer to the window. "A thief. Ha! *muy bueno* — but it is not *I*, you understand — I, Cæsar Briones, who am the thief! No! It is that swaggering *espadachin* — that *fanfarron* of a Colonel Pendleton — that pattern of an official, Mr. Hathaway — that most beautiful heiress of the Californias, Miss *Arguello* — that are thieves! Yes — of a *name* — Miss Arguello — of a *name!* The name of Arguello!"

Paul rose to his feet.

"Ah, so! You start — you turn pale — you flash your eyes, señora, but you think you have deceived me all these years. You think I did not see your game at Rosario — yes, even when that foolish Castro *muchacha* first put that idea in your head. Who furnished you the facts you wanted? I — Mother of God! *such facts!* — I, who knew the Arguello pedigree — I, who know it was as impossible for you to be a daughter of them as — what?

let me think — as — as it is impossible for you to be the wife of that baron whom you would deceive with the rest! Ah, yes; it was a high flight for you, Mees — Mees — Doña Fulana — a noble game for you to bring down!"

Why did she not speak? What was she doing? If she had but uttered a single word of protest, of angry dismissal, Paul would have flown to her side. It could not be the paralysis of personal fear: the balcony was wide; she could easily pass to the end; she could even see his open window.

"Why did I do this? Because I loved you, señora — and you knew it! Ah! you can turn your face away now; you can pretend to misunderstand me, as you did a moment ago; you can part from me now like a mere acquaintance — but it was not always so! No, it was *you* who brought me here; your eyes that smiled into mine — and drove home the colonel's request that I and my sister should accompany you. God! I was weak then! You smile, señora; you think you have succeeded — you and your pompous colonel and your clever governor! You think you have compromised me, and perjured *me*, because of this. You are wrong! You think I dare not speak to this puppet of a baron, and that I have no proofs. You are wrong!"

"And even if you can produce them, what care I?" said Yerba unexpectedly, yet in a voice so free from excitement and passion that the weariness which Paul had at first noticed seemed to be the only dominant tone. "Suppose you prove that I am not an Arguello. Good! you have yet to show that a connection with any of your race would be anything but a disgrace."

"Ah! you defy me, little one! *Caramba!* Listen, then! You do not know all! When you thought I was only helping you to fabricate your claim to the Arguellos' name, I was finding out *who you really were!* Ah! It

was not so difficult as you fondly hope, señora. We were not all brutes and fools in the early days, though we stood aside to let your people run their vulgar course. It was your hired bully — your respected guardian — this dog of an *espadachin*, who let out a hint of the secret — with a prick of his blade — and a scandal. One of my peon women was a servant at the convent when you were a child, and recognized the woman who put you there and came to see you as a friend. She overheard the Mother Superior say it was your mother, and saw a necklace that was left for you to wear. Ah! you begin to believe! When I had put this and that together I found that Pepita could not identify you with the child that she had seen. But you, señora, you *yourself* supplied the missing proof! Yes! you supplied it with the *necklace* that you wore that evening at Rosario, when you wished to do honor to this young Hathaway — the guardian who had always thrown you off! Ah! — you now suspect why, perhaps! It was your mother's necklace that you wore, and you said so! That night I sent the good Pepita to identify it; to watch through the window from the garden when you were wearing it; to make it sure as the Creed. I sent her to your room late that night when you had changed your dress, that she might examine it among your jewels. And she did and will swear — look you! — *swear* that it is the one given you as a child by the woman at the convent, who was your mother! And who was that woman — eh? Who was the mother of the Arguello de la Yerba Buena? — who this noble ancestress?"

"Excuse me — but perhaps you are not aware that you are raising your voice in a lady's drawing-room, and that although you are speaking a language no one here understands, you are disturbing the hotel."

It was Paul, quiet, pale in the moonlight, erect on the balcony before the window. As Yerba, with a start,

retreated quickly into the room, Don Cæsar stepped forward angrily and suspiciously towards the window. He had his hand reached forward towards the handle as if to close the swinging sash against the intruder, when in an instant he was seized by Paul, tightly locked in a desperate grip, and whirled out on the balcony. Before he could gain breath to utter a cry, Hathaway had passed his right arm around the Mexican's throat, effectively stopping his utterance, and, with a supreme effort of strength, dragged him along the wall, falling with him into the open window of his own room. As he did so, to his inexpressible relief he heard the sash closed and the bolt drawn of the salon window, and regained his feet, collected, quiet, and triumphant.

"I am sorry," he said, coolly dusting his clothes, "to have been obliged to change the scene of this discussion so roughly, but you will observe that you can speak more freely *here*, and that any altercation *we* may have in this room will be less likely to attract comment."

"Assassin!" said Don Cæsar chokingly, as he struggled to his feet.

"Thank you. Relieve your feelings as much as you like here; in fact, if you would speak a little louder you would oblige me. The guests are beginning to be awake," continued Paul, with a wicked smile, indicating the noise of an opening door and footsteps in the passage, "and are now able to locate without difficulty the scene of the disturbance."

Briones apparently understood his meaning and the success of his stratagem. "You think you have saved *her* from disgrace," he said, with a livid smile, in a lower tone and a desperate attempt to imitate Paul's coolness. "For the present — ah — yees! perhaps in this hotel and this evening. But you have not stop my mouth for — a — tomorrow — and the whole world, Mr. Hathaway."

"Well," said Paul, looking at him critically, "I don't know about that. Of course, there 's the equal chance that you may kill me — but that 's a question for to-morrow, too."

The Mexican cast a quick glance at the door and window. Paul, as if carelessly, changed the key of the former from one pocket to the other, and stepped before the window.

"So this is a plot to murder me! Have a care! You are not in your own brigand California!"

"If you think so, alarm the house. They will find us quarreling, and you will only precipitate matters by receiving the insult that will make you fight — before them."

"I am r-ready, sir, when and where you will," said Briones, with a swaggering air but a shifting, furtive eye. "Open — a — the door."

"Pardon me. We will leave this room *together* in an hour for the station. We will board the night express that will take us in three hours beyond the frontier, where we can each find a friend."

"But my affairs here — my sister — I must see her."

"You shall write a note to her at that table, saying that important business — a dispatch — has called you away, and we will leave it with the porter to be delivered *in the morning*. Or — I do not restrict you — you can say what you like, provided she don't get it until we have left."

"And you make of me a prisoner, sir?"

"No; a visitor, Don Cæsar — a visitor whose conversation is so interesting that I am forced to detain him to hear more. You can pass the time pleasantly by finishing the story I was obliged to interrupt a moment ago. Do you know this mother of Miss Yerba, of whom you spoke?"

"That 's m — my affair."

"That means you don't know her. If you did, you 'd have had her within call. And, as she is the only person who is able to say that Miss Yerba is *not* an Arguello, you have been very remiss."

"Ah, bah! I am not one of your — a — lawyers."

"No; or you would know that, with no better evidence than you have, you might be sued for slander."

"Ah! Why does not Miss Yerba sue, then?"

"Because she probably expects that somebody will shoot you."

"As *you* for instance?"

"Perhaps."

"And if you do *not* — eh? — you have not stop my mouth, but your own. And if you *do*, you help her to marry the baron, your rival. You are not wise, friend Hathaway."

"May I remind you that you have not yet written to your sister, and you may prefer to do it carefully and deliberately?"

Don Cæsar arose with a vindictive glance at Paul, and pulled a chair before the table, as the latter placed pen, ink, and paper before him. "Take your time," he added, folding his arms and walking towards the window. "Say what you like, and don't let my presence restrain you."

The Mexican began to write furiously, then spasmodically, then slowly and reluctantly. "I war-r-n you, I shall expose all," he said suddenly.

"As you please."

"And shall say that if I disappear, you are my murderer — you understand — my *murderer!*"

"Don't consult me on a question of epithets, but go on."

Don Cæsar recommenced his writing with a malign smile. There was a sudden sharp rap at the door.

Don Cæsar leaped to his feet, grasped his papers, and rushed to the door; but Paul was before him. "Who is there?" he demanded.

"Pendleton."

At the sound of the colonel's voice Don Cæsar fell back.

Paul opened the door, admitted the tall figure of the colonel, and was about to turn the key again. But Pendleton lifted his hand in grim deprecation.

"That will do, Mr. Hathaway. I know all. But I wish to speak with Briones elsewhere, alone."

"Excuse me, Colonel Pendleton," said Paul firmly, "but I have the prior claim. Words have passed between this gentleman and myself which we are now on our way to the station and the frontier to settle. If you are willing to accompany us, I shall give you every opportunity to converse with him alone, and arrange whatever business you may have with him, provided it does not interfere with mine."

"My business," said Pendleton, "is of a personal nature, that will not interfere with any claim of yours that Mr. Briones may choose to admit, but is of a private quality that must be transacted between us now." His face was pale, and his voice, although steady and self-controlled, had that same strange suggestion of sudden age in it which Paul had before noticed. Whether Don Cæsar detected it, or whether he had some other instinctive appreciation of greater security, Paul could not tell. He seemed to recover his swagger again, as he said: —

"I shall hear what Colonel Pendleton has to say first. But I shall hold myself in readiness to meet you afterwards — you shall not fear, sir!"

Paul remained looking from the one to the other without speaking. It was Don Cæsar who returned his glance boldly and defiantly, Colonel Pendleton who, with thin white fingers pulling his mustache, evaded it. Then Paul unlocked the door, and said slowly, "In five minutes I leave this house for the station. I shall wait there until the train arrives. If this gentleman does not join me, I shall be better able to understand all this and take measures accordingly."

"And I tell to you, Meester Hathaway, sir," said Don Cæsar, striking an attitude in the doorway, "you shall do as *I* please — *Caramba !* — and shall beg" —

"Hold your tongue, sir, — or, by the Eternal !" — burst out Pendleton suddenly, bringing down his thin hand on the Mexican's shoulder. He stopped as suddenly. "Gentlemen, this is childish. Go, sir !" to Don Cæsar, pointing with a gaunt white finger into the darkened hall. "I will follow you. Mr. Hathaway, as an older man, and one who has seen a good deal of foolish altercation, I regret, sir, deeply regret, to be a witness to this belligerent quality in a law-maker and a public man ; and I must deprecate, sir, — deprecate, your demand on that gentleman for what, in the folly of youth, you are pleased to call personal satisfaction."

As he moved with dignity out of the room, Paul remained blankly staring after him. Was it all a dream ? — or was this Colonel Pendleton the duelist ? Had the old man gone crazy, or was he merely acting to veil some wild purpose ? His sudden arrival showed that Yerba must have sent for him and told him of Don Cæsar's threats ; would he be wild enough to attempt to strangle the man in some remote room or in the darkness of the passage ? He stepped softly into the hall : he could still hear the double tread of the two men : they had reached the staircase — they were *descending !* He heard the drowsy accents of the night porter and the swinging of the door — they were in the street !

Wherever they were going, or for what purpose, *he* must be at the station, as he had warned them he would be. He hastily threw a few things into his valise, and prepared to follow them. When he went downstairs he informed the porter that owing to an urgent call of business he should try to catch the through express at three o'clock, but they must retain his room and luggage until they heard from

him. He remembered Don Cæsar's letter. Had either of the gentlemen, his friends who had just gone out, left a letter or message? No, Excellency; the gentlemen were talking earnestly — he believed, in the South American language — and had not spoken to him.

Perhaps it was this that reminded Paul, as he crossed the square again, that he had made no preparation for any possible fatal issue to himself in this adventure. *She* would know it, however, and why he had undertaken it. He tried to think that perhaps some interest in himself had prompted her to send the colonel to him. Yet, mingled with this was an odd sense of a certain ridiculousness in his position: there was the absurdity of his prospective antagonist being even now in confidential consultation with his own friend and ally, whose functions he had usurped, and in whose interests he was about to risk his life. And as he walked away through the silent streets, the conviction more than once was forced upon him that he was going to an appointment that would not be kept.

He reached the station some ten minutes before the train was due. Two or three half-drowsy, wrapped-up passengers were already on the platform; but neither Don Cæsar nor Colonel Pendleton was among them. He explored the waiting-rooms and even the half-lit buffet, but with no better success. Telling the *Bahnhof Inspector* that his passage was only contingent upon the arrival of one or two companions, and describing them minutely to prevent mistakes, he began gloomily to pace before the ticket-office. Five minutes passed — the number of passengers did not increase; ten minutes; a distant shriek — the hoarse inquiry of the inspector — had the Herr's companions yet *gekommt?* the sudden glare of a Cyclopean eye in the darkness, the on-gliding of the long-jointed and gleaming spotted serpent, the train — a hurried glance around the platform, one or two guttural orders, the slamming of doors, the remounting

of black uniformed figures like caryatides along the *marchepieds*, a puff of vapor, and the train had come and gone without them.

Yet he would give his adversary fifteen minutes more to allow for accident or delay, or the possible arrival of the colonel with an explanation, and recommenced his gloomy pacing, as the *Bahnhof* sank back into half-lit repose. At the end of five minutes there was another shriek. Paul turned quickly to the inspector. Ah, then, there was another train? No; it was only the *up express* for Basle, going the other way and stopping at the *Nord Station*, half a mile away. It would not stop here, but the Herr would see it pass in a few moments at full speed.

It came presently, with a prolonged despairing shriek, out of the darkness; a flash, a rush and roar at his side, a plunge into the darkness again with the same despairing cry; a flutter of something white from one of the windows, like a loosened curtain, that at last seemed to detach itself, and, after a wild attempt to follow, suddenly soared aloft, whirled over and over, dropped, and drifted slowly, slantwise, to the ground.

The inspector had seen it, ran down the line, and picked it up. Then he returned with it to Paul with a look of sympathizing concern. It was a lady's handkerchief, evidently some signal waved to the well-born Herr, who was the only passenger on the platfrom. So, possibly, it might be from his friends, who by some stupid mischance had gone to the wrong station, and — *Gott im Himmel!* — it was hideously stupid, yet possible, got on the wrong train!

The Herr, a little pale, but composed, thought it *was* possible. No; he would not telegraph to the next station — not yet — he would inquire.

He walked quickly away, reaching the hotel breathlessly, yet in a space that seemed all too brief for his disconnected thought. There were signs of animation in the hall, and an

empty carriage was just reëntering the courtyard. The hall porter met him with demonstrative concern and apology. Ah! if he had only understood his Excellency better, he could have saved him all this trouble. Evidently his Excellency was going with the Arguello party, who had ordered a carriage, doubtless, for the same important journey, an hour before, yet had left only a few moments after his Excellency, and his Excellency, it would appear, had gone to the wrong station.

Paul pushed hurriedly past the man and ascended to his room. Both windows were open, and in the faint moonlight he could see that something white was pinned to his pillow. With nervous fingers he relit his candles, and found it was a note in Yerba's handwriting. As he opened it, a tiny spray of the vine that had grown on the crumbling wall fell at his feet. He picked it up, pressed it to his lips, and read, with dim eyes, as follows: —

You know now why I spoke to you as I did to-day, and why the other half of this precious spray is the only memory I care to carry with me out of this crumbling ruin of all my hopes. You were right, Paul: my taking you there *was an omen* — not to you, who can never be anything but proud, beloved, and true — but to *me* of all the shame and misery. Thank you for all you have done — for all you would do, my friend, and don't think me ungrateful, only because I am unworthy of it. Try to forgive me, but don't forget me, even if you must hate me. Perhaps, if you knew all — you might still love a little the poor girl to whom you have already given the only name she can ever take from you — YERBA BUENA!

CHAPTER VII

It was already autumn, and in the city of New York an early Sunday morning breeze was sweeping up the leaves that had fallen from the regularly planted ailantus-trees before the brown-stone frontage of a row of monotonously alike five-storied houses on one of the principal avenues. The Pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church, that uplifted its double towers on the corner, stopped before one of these dwellings, ran up the dozen broad steps, and rang the bell. He was presently admitted to the sombre richness of a hall and drawing-room with high-backed furniture of dark carved woods, like cathedral stalls, and, hat in hand, somewhat impatiently awaited the arrival of his hostess and parishioner. The door opened to a tall, white-haired woman in lustreless black silk. She was regular and resolute in features, of fine but unbending presence, and, though somewhat past middle age, showed no signs of either the weakness or mellowness of years.

"I am sorry to disturb your Sabbath morning meditations, Sister Argalls, nor would I if it were not in the line of Christian duty; but Sister Robbins is unable to-day to make her usual Sabbath hospital visit, and I thought if you were excused from the Foreign Missionary class and Bible instruction at three you might undertake her functions. I know, my dear old friend," he continued, with bland deprecation of her hard-set eyes, "how distasteful this promiscuous mingling with the rough and ungodly has always been to you, and how reluctant you are to be placed in the position of being liable to hear coarse, vulgar, or

irreverent speech. I think, too, in our long and pleasant pastoral relations, you have always found me mindful of it. I admit I have sometimes regretted that your late husband had not more generally familiarized you with the ways of the world. But so it is — we all have our weaknesses. If not one thing, another. And as Envy and Uncharitableness sometimes find their way in even Christian hearts, I should like you to undertake this office for the sake of example. There are some, dear Sister Argalls, who think that the rich widow who is most liberal in the endowment of the goods that Providence has intrusted to her hands claims therefore to be exempt from labor in the Christian vineyard. Let us teach them how unjust they are."

"I am willing," said the lady, with a dry, determined air. "I suppose these patients are not professedly bad characters?"

"By no means. A few, perhaps; but the majority are unfortunates — dependent either upon public charity or some small provision made by their friends."

"Very well."

"And you understand that though they have the privilege of rejecting your Christian ministrations, dear Sister Argalls, you are free to judge when you may be patient or importunate with them?"

"I understand."

The Pastor was not an unkindly man, and, as he glanced at the uncompromising look in Mrs. Argalls's eyes, felt for a moment some inconsistency between his humane instincts and his Christian duty. "Some of them may require, and be benefited by, a stern monitress, and Sister Robbins, I fear, was weak," he said consolingly to himself, as he descended the steps again.

At three o'clock Mrs. Argalls, with a reticule and a few tracts, was at the door of St. John's Hospital. As she displayed her testimonials and announced that she had taken

Mrs. Robbins's place, the officials received her respectfully, and gave some instructions to the attendants, which, however, did not stop some individual comments.

"I say, Jim, it does n't seem the square thing to let that grim old girl loose among them poor convalescents."

"Well, I don't know: they say she 's rich and gives a lot o' money away, but if she tackles that swearing old Kentuckian in No. 3, she 'll have her hands full."

However, the criticism was scarcely fair, for Mrs. Argalls, although moving rigidly along from bed to bed of the ward, equipped with a certain formula of phrases, nevertheless dropped from time to time some practical common-sense questions that showed an almost masculine intuition of the patients' needs and requirements. Nor did she betray any of that over-sensitive shrinking from coarseness which the good Pastor had feared, albeit she was quick to correct its exhibition. The languid men listened to her with half-aggressive, half-amused interest, and some of the satisfaction of taking a bitter but wholesome tonic. It was not until she reached the bed at the farther end of the ward that she seemed to meet with any check.

It was occupied by a haggard man, with a long white mustache and features that seemed wasted by inward struggle and fever. At the first sound of her voice he turned quickly towards her, lifted himself on his elbow, and gazed fixedly in her face.

"Kate Howard — by the Eternal!" he said in a low voice.

Despite her rigid self-possession the woman started, glanced hurriedly around, and drew nearer to him.

"Pendleton!" she said in an equally suppressed voice. "What, in God's name, are you doing here?"

"Dying, I reckon — sooner or later," he said grimly, "that 's what they do here."

"But — what," she went on hurriedly, still glancing over

her shoulder as if she suspected some trick — "what has brought you to this?"

"*You!*" said the colonel, dropping back exhaustedly on his pillow. "You and your daughter."

"I don't understand you," she said quickly, yet regarding him with stern rigidity. "You know perfectly well I have *no* daughter. You know perfectly well that I've kept the word I gave you ten years ago, and that I have been dead to her as she has been to me."

"I know," said the colonel, "that within the last three months I have paid away my last cent to keep the mouth of an infernal scoundrel shut who *knows* that you are her mother, and threatens to expose her to her friends. I know that I'm dying here of an old wound that I got when I shut the mouth of another hound who was ready to bark at her two years after you disappeared. I know that between you and her I've let my old nigger die of a broken heart, because I could n't keep him to suffer with me, and I know that I'm here a pauper on the State. I know that, Kate, and when I say it I don't regret it. I've kept my word to *you*, and, by the Eternal! your daughter's worth it. For if there ever was a fair and peerless creature — it's your child!"

"And she — a rich woman — unless she squandered the fortune I gave her — lets you lie here!" said the woman grimly.

"She don't know it."

"She *should* know it! Have you quarreled?" She was looking at him keenly.

"She distrusts me, because she half suspects the secret, and I had n't the heart to tell her all."

"All? What does she know? What does this man know? What has been told her?" she said rapidly.

"She only knows that the name she has taken she has no right to."

"Right to? Why, it was written on the Trust — Yerba Buena."

"No, not that. She thought it was a mistake. She took the name of Arguello."

"What?" said Mrs. Argalls, suddenly grasping the invalid's wrist with both hands. "What name?" Her eyes were startled from their rigid coldness, her lips were colorless.

"Arguello! It was some foolish schoolgirl fancy which that hound helped to foster in her. Why — what 's the matter, Kate?"

The woman dropped the helpless man's wrist, then, with an effort, recovered herself sufficiently to rise, and, with an air of increased decorum, as if the spiritual character of their interview excluded worldly intrusion, adjusted the screen around his bed, so as partly to hide her own face and Pendleton's. Then, dropping into the chair beside him, she said, in her old voice, from which the burden of ten long years seemed to have been lifted: —

"Harry, what 's that you 're playing on me?"

"I don't understand you," said Pendleton amazedly.

"Do you mean to say you don't know it, and did n't tell her yourself?" she said curtly.

"What? Tell her what?" he repeated impatiently.

"That Arguello *was* her father!"

"Her father?" He tried to struggle to his elbow again, but she laid her hand masterfully upon his shoulder and forced him back. "Her father!" he repeated hurriedly. "Juan de Arguello! Great God! — are you sure?"

Quietly and yet mechanically gathering the scattered tracts from the coverlet, and putting them back, one by one in her reticule, she closed it and her lips with a snap as she uttered — "Yes."

Pendleton remained staring at her silently. "Yes," he

muttered, "it may have been some instinct of the child's, or some diabolical fancy of Briones'. But," he said bitterly, "true or not, she has no right to his name."

"And I say she *has*."

She had risen to her feet, with her arms folded across her breast, in an attitude of such Puritan composure that the distant spectators might have thought she was delivering an exordium to the prostrate man.

"I met Juan de Arguello, for the second time, in New Orleans," she said slowly, "eight years ago. He was still rich, but ruined in health by dissipation. I was tired of my way of life. He proposed that I should marry him to take care of him and legitimatize our child. I was forced to tell him what I had done with her, and that the Trust could not be disturbed until she was of age and her own mistress. He assented. We married, but he died within a year. He died, leaving with me his acknowledgment of her as his child, and the right to claim her if I chose."

"And ?" — interrupted the colonel with sparkling eyes.

"*I don't choose.*"

"Hear me!" she continued firmly. "With his name and my own mistress, and the girl, as I believed, properly provided for and ignorant of my existence, I saw no necessity for reopening the past. I resolved to lead a new life as his widow. I came North. In the little New England town where I first stopped, the country people contracted my name to Mrs. Argalls. I let it stand so. I came to New York and entered the service of the Lord and the bonds of the Church, Henry Pendleton, as Mrs. Argalls, and have remained so ever since."

"But you would not object to Yerba knowing that you lived, and rightly bore her father's name ?" said Pendleton eagerly.

The woman looked at him with compressed lips. "I

should. I have buried all my past, and all its consequences. Let me not seek to reopen it or recall them."

"But if you knew that she was as proud as yourself, and that this very uncertainty as to her name and parentage, although she has never known the whole truth, kept her from taking the name and becoming the wife of a man whom she loves?"

"Whom she loves!"

"Yes; one of her guardians — Hathaway — to whom you intrusted her when she was a child."

"Paul Hathaway — but *he* knew it."

"Yes. But *she* does not know he does. He has kept the secret faithfully, even when she refused him."

She was silent for a moment, and then said: —

"So be it. I consent."

"And you'll write to her?" said the colonel eagerly.

"No. But *you* may, and if you want them I will furnish you with such proofs as you may require."

"Thank you." He held out his hand with such a happy yet childish gratitude upon his worn face that her own trembled slightly as she took it. "Good-by!"

"I shall see you soon," she said.

"I shall be here," he said grimly.

"I think not," she returned, with the first relaxation of her smileless face, and moved away.

As she passed out she asked to see the house surgeon. How soon did he think the patient she had been conversing with could be removed from the hospital with safety? Did Mrs. Argalls mean "far"? Mrs. Argalls meant as far as *that* — tendering her card and eminently respectable address. Ah! — perhaps in a week. Not before? Perhaps before, unless complications ensued; the patient had been much run down physically, though, as Mrs. Argalls had probably noticed, he was singularly strong in nervous will force. Mrs. Argalls *had* noticed it, and considered it

an extraordinary case of conviction — worthy of the closest watching and care. When he was able to be moved she would send her own carriage and her own physician to superintend his transfer. In the mean time he was to want for nothing. Certainly, he had given very little trouble, and, in fact, wanted very little. Just now he had only asked for paper, pens, and ink.

CHAPTER VIII

As Mrs. Argalls's carriage rolled into Fifth Avenue, it for a moment narrowly grazed another carriage, loaded with luggage, driving up to a hotel. The abstracted traveler within it was Paul Hathaway, who had returned from Europe that morning.

Paul entered the hotel, and going to the register mechanically, turned its leaves for the previous arrivals, with the same hopeless patience that had for the last six weeks accompanied this habitual preliminary performance on his arrival at the principal European hotels. For he had lost all trace of Yerba, Pendleton, Milly, and the Briones from the day of their departure. The entire party seemed to have separated at Basle, and, in that eight-hours' start they had of him, to have disappeared to the four cardinal points. He had lingered a few days in London to transact some business; he would linger a few days longer in New York before returning to San Francisco.

The daily papers already contained his name in the list of the steamer passengers who arrived that morning. It might meet *her* eye, although he had been haunted during the voyage by a terrible fancy that she was still in Europe, and had either hidden herself in some obscure provincial town with the half-crazy Pendleton, or had entered a convent, or even, in reckless despair, had accepted the name and title of some penniless nobleman. It was this miserable doubt that had made his homeward journey at times seem like a cruel desertion of her, while at other moments the conviction that Milly's Californian relatives might give him

some clue to her whereabouts made him feverishly fearful of delaying an hour on his way to San Francisco. He did not believe that she had tolerated the company of Briones a single moment after the scene at the Bad Hof, and yet he had no confidence in the colonel's attitude towards the Mexican. Hopeless of the future as her letter seemed, still its naïve and tacit confession of her feelings at the moment was all that sustained him.

Two days passed, and he still lingered aimlessly in New York. In two days more the Panama steamer would sail — yet in his hesitation he had put off securing his passage. He visited the offices of the different European steamer lines, and examined the recent passenger lists, but there was no record of any of the party. What made his quest seem the more hopeless was his belief that, after Briones' revelation, she had cast off the name of Arguello and taken some other. She might even be in New York under that new name now.

On the morning of the third day, among his letters was one that bore the postmark of a noted suburban settlement of wealthy villa-owners on the Hudson River. It was from Milly Woods, stating that her father had read of his arrival in the papers, and begged he would dine and stay the next night with them at Under Cliff, if he "still had any interest in the fortunes of old friends. Of course," added the perennially incoherent Milly, "if it bores you we sha'n't expect you." The quick color came to Paul's care-worn cheek. He telegraphed assent, and at sunset that afternoon stepped off the train at a little private woodland station — so abnormally rustic and picturesque in its brown-bark walls covered with scarlet Virginia creepers that it looked like a theatrical erection.

Mr. Woods's station wagon was in waiting, but Paul, handing the driver his valise, and ascertaining the general direction of the house, and that it was not far distant, told him to go on and he would follow afoot. The tremor of

vague anticipation had already come upon him; something that he knew not whether he feared or longed for, only that it was inevitable, had begun to possess him. He would soon recover himself in the flaring glory of this woodland, and the invigoration of this hale October air.

It was a beautiful and brilliant sunset, yet not so beautiful and brilliant but that the whole opulent forest around him seemed to challenge and repeat its richest as well as its most delicate dyes. The reddening west, seen through an opening of scarlet maples, was no longer red; the golden glory of the sun, sinking over a promontory of gleaming yellow sumach that jutted out into the noble river, was shorn of its intense radiance; at times in the thickest woods he seemed surrounded by a yellow nimbus; at times so luminous was the glow of these translucent leaves that the position of the sun itself seemed changed, or the shadows cast in defiance of its glory. As he walked on, long reaches of the lordly placid stream at his side were visible, as far as the terraces of the opposite shore, lifted on basaltic columns, themselves streaked and veined with gold and fire. Paul had seen nothing like this since his boyhood; for an instant the great heroics of the Sierran landscape were forgotten in this magnificent harlequinade.

A dim footpath crossed the road in the direction of the house, which for the last few moments had been slowly etching itself as a soft vignette in a tinted aureole of walnut and maple upon the steel blue of the river. He was hesitating whether to take this short cut or continue on by the road, when he heard the rustling of quick footsteps among the fallen leaves of the variegated thicket through which it stole. He stopped short, the leafy screen shivered and parted, and a tall graceful figure, like a draped and hidden Columbine, burst through its painted foliage. It was Yerba!

She ran quickly towards him, with parted lips, shining

eyes, and a few scarlet leaves clinging to the stuff of her worsted dress in a way that recalled the pink petals of Rosario.

"When I saw you were not in the wagon and knew you were walking I slipped out to intercept you, as I had something to tell you before you saw the others. I thought you would n't mind." She stopped and suddenly hesitated.

What was this new strange shyness that seemed to droop her eyelids, her proud head, and even the slim hand that had been so impulsively and frankly outstretched towards him? And he — Paul — what was he doing? Where was this passionate outburst that had filled his heart for nights and days? Where this eager tumultuous questioning that his feverish lips had rehearsed hour by hour? Where this desperate courage that would sweep the whole world away if it stood between them? Where, indeed? He was standing only a few feet from her — cold, silent, and tremulous!

She drew back a step, lifted her head with a quick toss that seemed to condense the moisture in her shining eyes, and sent what might have been a glittering dew-drop flying into the loosed tendrils of her hair. Calm and erect again, she put her little hand to her jacket pocket.

"I only wanted you to read a letter I got yesterday," she said, taking out an envelope.

The spell was broken. Paul caught eagerly at the hand that held the letter, and would have drawn her to him; but she put him aside gravely but sweetly.

"Read that letter!"

"Tell me of *yourself* first!" he broke out passionately. "Why you fled from me, and why I now find you here, by the merest chance, without a word of summons from yourself, Yerba? Tell me who is with you? Are you free and your own mistress — free to act for yourself and me?

Speak, darling — don't be cruel! Since that night I have longed for you, sought for you, and suffered for you every day and hour. Tell me if I find you the same Yerba who wrote " —

" Read that letter! "

" I care for none but the one you left me. I have read and re-read it, Yerba — carried it always with me. See! I have it here! " He was in the act of withdrawing it from his breast-pocket, when she put up her hand piteously.

" Please, Paul, please — read this letter first! "

There was something in her new supplicating grace, still retaining the faintest suggestion of her old girlish archness, that struck him. He took the letter and opened it. It was from Colonel Pendleton.

Plainly, concisely, and formally, without giving the name of his authority or suggesting his interview with Mrs. Argalls, he had informed Yerba that he had documentary testimony that she was the daughter of the late Juan de Arguello, and legally entitled to bear his name. A copy of the instructions given to his wife, recognizing Yerba Buena, the ward of the San Francisco Trust, as his child and hers, and leaving to the mother the choice of making it known to her and others, was inclosed.

Paul turned an unchanged face upon Yerba, who was watching him eagerly, uneasily, almost breathlessly.

" And you think this concerns *me!* " he said bitterly. " You think only of this, when I speak of the precious letter that bade me hope, and brought me to you? "

" Paul," said the girl, with wondering eyes and hesitating lips, " do you mean to say that — that — this is — nothing to you? "

" Yes — but forgive me, darling! " he broke out again, with a sudden vague remorsefulness, as he once more sought her elusive hand. " I am a brute — an egotist! I forgot that it might be something to *you.*"

"Paul," continued the girl, her voice quivering with a strange joy, "do you say that you — *you* yourself, care nothing for this?"

"Nothing," he answered, gazing at her transfigured face with admiring wonder.

"And" — more timidly, as a faint aurora kindled in her cheeks — "that you don't care — that — that — I am coming to you *with a name*, to give you in — exchange?"

He started.

"Yerba, you are not mocking me? You will be my wife?"

She smiled, yet moving softly backwards with the grave stateliness of a vanishing yet beckoning goddess, until she reached the sumach bush from which she had emerged. He followed. Another backward step, and it yielded to let her through; but even as it did so she caught him in her arms, and for a single moment it closed upon them both, and hid them in its glory. A still lingering song-bird, possibly convinced that he had mistaken the season, and that spring had really come, flew out with a little cry to carry the message south; but even then Paul and Yerba emerged with such innocent, childlike gravity, and, side by side, walked so composedly towards the house that he thought better of it.

CHAPTER IX

It was only the *third* time they had ever met — did Paul consider that when he thought her cold? Did he know now why she had not understood him at Rosario? Did he understand now how calculating and selfish he had seemed to her that night? Could he look her in the face now — no, he must be quiet — they were so near the house, and everybody could see them! — and say that he had ever believed her capable of making up that story of the Arguellos? Could he not have guessed that she had some memory of that name in her childish recollections, how or where she knew not? Was it strange that a daughter should have an instinct of her father? Was it kind to her to know all this himself and yet reveal nothing? Because her mother and father had quarreled, and her mother had run away with somebody and left her a ward to strangers — was that to be concealed from her, and she left without a name? This, and much more, tenderly reproachful, bewildering and sweetly illogical, yet inexpressibly dear to Paul, as they walked on in the gloaming.

More to the purpose, however, the fact that Briones, as far as she knew, did not know her mother, and never before the night at Strudle Bad had ever spoken of her. Still more to the purpose, that he had disappeared after an interview with the colonel that night, and that she believed always that the colonel had bought him off. It was not with *her* money. She had sometimes thought that the colonel and he were in confidence, and that was why she had lately distrusted Pendleton. But she had refused to

take the name of Arguello again after that scene, and had called herself only by the name he had given her — would he forgive her for ever speaking of it as she had? — Yerba Buena. But on shipboard, at Milly's suggestion, and to keep away from Briones, her name had appeared on the passenger list as Miss Good, and they had come, not to New York, but to Boston.

It was possible that the colonel had extracted the information he sent her *from* Briones. They had parted from Pendleton in London, as he was grumpy and queer, and, as Milly thought, becoming very miserly and avaricious as he grew older, for he was always quarreling over the hotel bills. But he had Mrs. Woods's New York address at Under Cliff, and, of course, guessed where she was. There was no address on his letter: he had said he would write again.

Thus much until they reached the steps of the veranda, and Milly, flying down, was ostentatiously overwhelmed with the unexpected appearance of Mr. Paul Hathaway and Yerba, whom she had been watching from the window for the last ten minutes. Then the appearance of Mr. Woods, Californian and reminiscent, and Mrs. Woods, metropolitan, languid and forgetful, and the sudden and formal retirement of the girls. An arch and indefinable mystery in the air whenever Paul and Yerba appeared together — of which even the servants were discreetly conscious.

At dinner Mr. Woods again became retrospective and Californian, and dwelt upon the changes he had noticed. It appeared the old pioneers had in few cases attained a comfortable fortune for their old age. "I know," he added, "that your friend Colonel Pendleton has dropped a good deal of money over in Europe. Somebody told me that he actually was reduced to take a steerage passage home. It looks as if he might gamble — it 's an old Californian complaint." As Paul, who had become suddenly grave again,

did not speak, Mrs. Woods reminded them that she had always doubted the colonel's moral principles. Old as he was, he had never got over that freedom of life and social opinion which he had imbibed in early days. For her part, she was very glad he had not returned from Europe with the girls, though, of course, the presence of Don Cæsar and his sister during their European sojourn was a corrective. As Paul's face grew darker during this languid criticism, Yerba, who had been watching it with a new and absorbing sympathy, seized the first moment when they left the table to interrogate him with heartbreaking eyes.

"You don't think, Paul, that the colonel is really poor?"

"God only knows," said Paul. "I tremble to think how that scoundrel may have bled him."

"And all for me! Paul, dear, you know you were saying in the woods that you would never, never touch my money. What" — exultingly — "if we gave it to him?"

What answer Paul made did not transpire, for it seemed to have been indicated by an interval of profound silence.

But the next morning, as he and Mr. Woods were closeted in the library, Yerba broke in upon them with a pathetic face and a telegram in her hand. "Oh, Paul — Mr. Hathaway — *it 's true!*"

Paul seized the telegram quickly: it had no signature, only the line: "Colonel Pendleton is dangerously ill at St. John's Hospital."

"I must go at once," said Paul, rising.

"Oh, Paul" — imploringly — "let me go with you! I should never forgive myself if — *and it 's addressed to me*, and what would he think if I did n't come?"

Paul hesitated. "Mrs. Woods will let Milly go with us — and she can stay at the hotel. Say yes," she continued, seeking his eyes eagerly.

He consented, and in half an hour they were in the train

for New York. Leaving Milly at the hotel, ostensibly in deference to the Woods's prejudices, but really to save the presence of a third party at this meeting, Paul drove with Yerba rapidly to the hospital. They were admitted to an anteroom. The house surgeon received them respectfully, but doubtingly. The patient was a little better this morning, but very weak. There was a lady now with him — a member of a religious and charitable guild, who had taken the greatest interest in him — indeed, she had wished to take him to her own home — but he had declined at first, and now he was too weak to be removed.

"But I received this telegram: it must have been sent at his request," protested Yerba.

The house surgeon looked at the beautiful face. He was mortal. He would see if the patient was able to stand another interview; possibly the regular visitor might withdraw.

When he had gone, an attendant volunteered the information that the old gentleman was perhaps a little excited at times. He was a wonderful man; he had seen a great deal; he talked much of California and the early days; he was very interesting. Ah, it would be all right now if the doctor found him well enough, for the lady was already going — that was she, coming through the hall.

She came slowly towards them — erect, gray, grim — a still handsome apparition. Paul started. To his horror, Yerba ran impulsively forward, and said eagerly, "Is he better? Can he see us now?"

The woman halted an instant, seemed to gather the prayer-book and reticule she was carrying closer to her breast, but was otherwise unchanged. Replying to Paul rather than to the young girl, she said rigidly, "The patient is able to see Mr. Hathaway and Miss Yerba Buena," and passed slowly on. But as she reached the door she unloosed her black mourning veil from her bonnet, and

seemed to drop it across her face with the gesture that Paul remembered she had used twelve years ago.

"She frightens me!" said Yerba, turning a suddenly startled face on Paul. "Oh, Paul, I hope it is n't an omen, but she looked like some one from the grave!"

"Hush!" said Paul, turning away a face that was whiter than her own. "They are coming now."

The house surgeon had returned a trifle graver. They might see him now, but they must be warned that he wandered at times a little; and, if he might suggest, if it was anything of family importance, they had better make the most of their time and his lucid intervals. Perhaps if they were old friends — *very* old friends — he would recognize them. He was wandering much in the past — always in the past.

They found him in the end of the ward, but so carefully protected and partitioned off by screens that the space around his cot had all the privacy and security of an apartment. He was very much changed; they would scarcely have known him, but for the delicately curved aquiline profile and the long white mustache — now so faint and etherealized as to seem a mere spirit wing that rested on his pillow. To their surprise he opened his eyes with a smile of perfect recognition, and, with thin fingers beyond the coverlid, beckoned to them to approach. Yet there was still a shadow of his old reserve in his reception of Paul, and, although one hand interlocked the fingers of Yerba — who had at first rushed impulsively forward and fallen on her knees beside the bed — and the other softly placed itself upon her head, his eyes were fixed upon the young man's with the ceremoniousness due to a stranger.

"I am glad to see, sir," he began in a slow, broken, but perfectly audible voice, "that now you are — satisfied with the right — of this young lady — to bear the name of — Arguello — and her relationship — sir — to one of the oldest" —

"But, my dear old friend," broke out Paul earnestly, "I *never* cared for that — I beg you to believe"—

"He never — never — cared for it — dear, dear colonel," sobbed Yerba passionately: "it was all my fault — he thought only of me — you wrong him!"

"*I* think otherwise," said the colonel, with grim and relentless deliberation. "I have a vivid — impression — sir — of an — interview I had with you — at the St. Charles — where you said" — He was silent for a moment, and then in a quite different voice called faintly, "George!"

Paul and Yerba glanced quickly at each other.

"George, set out some refreshment for the Honorable Paul Hathaway. The best, sir — you understand. . . . A good nigger, sir — a good boy; and he never leaves me, sir. Only, by gad! sir, he will starve himself and his family to be with me. I brought him with me to California away back in the fall of '49. Those were the early days, sir — the early days."

His head had fallen back quite easily on the pillow now; but a slight film seemed to be closing over his dark eyes, like the inner lid of an eagle when it gazes upon the sun.

"They were the old days, sir — the days of Men — when a man's *word* was enough for anything, and his trigger-finger settled any doubt. When the Trust that he took from Man, Woman, or Child was never broken. When the tide, sir, that swept through the Golden Gate came up as far as Montgomery Street."

He did not speak again. But they who stood beside him knew that the tide had once more come up to Montgomery Street, and was carrying Harry Pendleton away with it.

THE CHATELAINE OF BURNT RIDGE

CHAPTER I

It had grown dark on Burnt Ridge. Seen from below, the whole serrated crest, that had glittered in the sunset as if its interstices were eaten by consuming fires, now closed up its ranks of blackened shafts and became again harsh and sombre *chevaux de frise* against the sky. A faint glow still lingered over the red valley road, as if it were its own reflection, rather than any light from beyond the darkened ridge. Night was already creeping up out of remote canons and along the furrowed flanks of the mountain, or settling on the nearer woods with the sound of homecoming and innumerable wings. At a point where the road began to encroach upon the mountain side in its slow winding ascent the darkness had become so real that a young girl cantering along the rising terrace found difficulty in guiding her horse, with eyes still dazzled by the sunset fires.

In spite of her precautions, the animal suddenly shied at some object in the obscured roadway, and nearly unseated her. The accident disclosed not only the fact that she was riding in a man's saddle, but also a foot and ankle that her ordinary walking-dress was too short to hide. It was evident that her equestrian exercise was extempore, and that at that hour and on that road she had not expected to meet company. But she was apparently a good horsewoman, for the mischance which might have thrown a less practical or more timid rider seemed of little moment to her. With a strong hand and determined gesture she wheeled her frightened horse back into the track, and rode him directly

at the object. But here she herself slightly recoiled, for it was the body of a man lying in the road.

As she leaned forward over her horse's shoulder, she could see by the dim light that he was a miner, and that, though motionless, he was breathing stertorously. Drunk, no doubt! — an accident of the locality alarming only to her horse. But although she cantered impatiently forward, she had not proceeded a hundred yards before she stopped reflectively, and trotted back again. He had not moved. She could now see that his head and shoulders were covered with broken clods of earth and gravel, and smaller fragments lay at his side. A dozen feet above him on the hillside there was a foot trail which ran parallel with the bridle-road, and occasionally overhung it. It seemed possible that he might have fallen from the trail and been stunned.

Dismounting, she succeeded in dragging him to a safer position by the bank. The act discovered his face, which was young, and unknown to her. Wiping it with the silk handkerchief which was loosely slung around his neck after the fashion of his class, she gave a quick feminine glance around her and then approached her own and rather handsome face near his lips. There was no odor of alcohol in the thick and heavy respiration. Mounting again, she rode forward at an accelerated pace, and in twenty minutes had reached a higher tableland of the mountain, a cleared opening in the forest that showed signs of careful cultivation, and a large, rambling, yet picturesque-looking dwelling, whose unpainted redwood walls were hidden in roses and creepers. Pushing open a swinging gate, she entered the inclosure as a brown-faced man, dressed as a vaquero, came towards her as if to assist her to alight. But she had already leaped to the ground and thrown him the reins.

"Miguel," she said, with a mistress's quiet authority in her boyish contralto voice, "put Glory in the covered

wagon, and drive down the road as far as the valley turning. There 's a man lying near the right bank, drunk, or sick, maybe, or perhaps crippled by a fall. Bring him up here, unless somebody has found him already, or you happen to know who he is and where to take him."

The vaquero raised his shoulders, half in disappointed expectation of some other command. "And your brother, señora, he has not himself arrived."

A light shadow of impatience crossed her face. "No," she said bluntly. "Come, be quick."

She turned towards the house as the man moved away. Already a gaunt-looking old man had appeared in the porch, and was awaiting her with his hand shadowing his angry, suspicious eyes, and his lips moving querulously.

"Of course, you 've got to stand out there and give orders and 'tend to your own business afore you think o' speaking to your own flesh and blood," he said aggrievedly. "That 's all *you* care!"

"There was a sick man lying in the road, and I 've sent Miguel to look after him," returned the girl, with a certain contemptuous resignation.

"Oh yes!" struck in another voice, which seemed to belong to the female of the first speaker's species, and to be its equal in age and temper, "and I reckon you saw a jaybird on a tree, or a squirrel on the fence, and either of 'em was more important to you than your own brother."

"Steve did n't come by the stage, and did n't send any message," continued the young girl, with the same coldly resigned manner. "No one had any news of him, and, as I told you before, I did n't expect any."

"Why don't you say right out you did n't *want* any?" said the old man sneeringly. "Much you inquired! No; I orter hev gone myself, and I would if I was master here, instead of me and your mother bein' the dust of the yearth beneath your feet."

The young girl entered the house, followed by the old man, passing an old woman seated by the window, who seemed to be nursing her resentment and a large Bible which she held clasped against her shawled bosom at the same moment. Going to the wall, she hung up her large hat and slightly shook the red dust from her skirts as she continued her explanation, in the same deep voice, with a certain monotony of logic and possibly of purpose and practice also.

"You and mother know as well as I do, father, that Stephen is no more to be depended upon than the wind that blows. It 's three years since he has been promising to come, and even getting money to come, and yet he has never showed his face, though he has been a dozen times within five miles of this house. He does n't come because he does n't want to come. As to *your* going over to the stage-office, I went there myself at the last moment to save you the mortification of asking questions of strangers that they know have been a dozen times answered already."

There was such a ring of absolute truthfulness, albeit worn by repetition, in the young girl's deep honest voice that for one instant her two more emotional relatives quailed before it; but only for a moment.

"That 's right!" shrilled the old woman. "Go on and abuse your own brother. It 's only the fear you have that he 'll make his fortune yet and shame you before the father and mother you despise."

The young girl remained standing by the window, motionless and apparently passive, as if receiving an accepted and usual punishment. But here the elder woman gave way to sobs and some incoherent snuffling, at which the younger went away. Whether she recognized in her mother's tears the ordinary deliquescence of emotion, or whether, as a woman herself, she knew that this mere feminine conventionality could not possibly be directed at her, and that the

actual conflict between them had ceased, she passed slowly on to an inner hall, leaving the male victim, her unfortunate father, to succumb, as he always did sooner or later, to their influence. Crossing the hall, which was decorated with a few elk horns, Indian trophies, and mountain pelts, she entered another room, and closed the door behind her with a gesture of relief.

The room, which looked upon a porch, presented a singular combination of masculine business occupations and feminine taste and adornment. A desk covered with papers, a shelf displaying a ledger and account-books, another containing works of reference, a table with a vase of flowers and a lady's riding-whip upon it, a map of California flanked on either side by an embroidered silken workbag and an oval mirror decked with grasses, a calendar and interest-table hanging below two schoolgirl crayons of classic heads with the legend, "Josephine Forsyth *fecit*," — were part of its incongruous accessories. The young girl went to her desk, but presently moved and turned towards the window thoughtfully. The last gleam had died from the steel-blue sky; a few lights like star points began to prick out the lower valley. The expression of monotonous restraint and endurance had not yet faded from her face.

Yet she had been accustomed to scenes like the one she had just passed through since her girlhood. Five years ago, Alexander Forsyth, her uncle, had brought her to this spot — then a mere log cabin on the hillside — as a refuge from the impoverished and shiftless home of his elder brother Thomas and his ill-tempered wife. Here Alexander Forsyth, by reason of his more dominant character and business capacity, had prospered until he became a rich and influential ranch owner. Notwithstanding her father's jealousy of Alexander's fortune, and the open rupture that followed between the brothers, Josephine retained her position in the heart and home of her uncle without espousing the cause of

either; and her father was too prudent not to recognize the near and prospective advantages of such a mediator. Accustomed to her parents' extravagant denunciations, and her uncle's more repressed but practical contempt of them, the unfortunate girl early developed a cynical disbelief in the virtues of kinship in the abstract, and a philosophical resignation to its effects upon her personally. Believing that her father and uncle fairly represented the fraternal principle, she was quite prepared for the early defection and distrust of her vagabond and dissipated brother Stephen, and accepted it calmly. True to an odd standard of justice, which she had erected from the crumbling ruins of her own domestic life, she was tolerant of everything but human perfection. This quality, however fatal to her higher growth, had given her a peculiar capacity for business which endeared her to her uncle. Familiar with the strong passions and prejudices of men, she had none of those feminine meannesses, a wholesome distrust of which had kept her uncle a bachelor. It was not strange, therefore, that when he died two years ago it was found that he had left her his entire property, real and personal, limited only by a single condition. She was to undertake the vocation of a "sole trader," and carry on the business under the name of "J. Forsyth." If she married, the estate and property were to be held distinct from her husband's, inalienable under the "Married Woman's Property Act," and subject during her life only to her own control and personal responsibilities as a trader.

The intense disgust and discomfiture of her parents, who had expected to more actively participate in their brother's fortune, may be imagined. But it was not equal to their fury when Josephine, instead of providing for them a separate maintenance out of her abundance, simply offered to transfer them and her brother to her own house on a domestic but not a business equality. There being no alternative but their former precarious shiftless life in their "played-

out" claim in the valley, they wisely consented, reserving the sacred right of daily protest and objurgation. In the economy of Burnt Ridge Ranch they alone took it upon themselves to represent the shattered domestic altar and its outraged Lares and Penates. And so conscientiously did they perform their task as even occasionally to impede the business visitor to the ranch, and to cause some of the more practical neighbors seriously to doubt the young girl's commercial wisdom. But she was firm. Whether she thought her parents a necessity of respectable domesticity, or whether she regarded their presence in the light of a penitential atonement for some previous disregard of them, no one knew. Public opinion inclined to the latter.

The black line of ridge faded out with her abstraction, and she turned from the window and lit the lamp on her desk. The yellow light illuminated her face and figure. In their womanly graces there was no trace of what some people believed to be a masculine character, except a singularly frank look of critical inquiry and patient attention in her dark eyes. Her long brown hair was somewhat rigidly twisted into a knot on the top of her head, as if more for security than ornament. Brown was also the prevailing tint of her eyebrows, thickly set eyelashes, and eyes, and was even suggested in the slight sallowness of her complexion. But her lips were well cut and fresh colored and her hands and feet small and finely formed. She would have passed for a pretty girl, had she not suggested something more.

She sat down, and began to examine a pile of papers before her with that concentration and attention to detail which was characteristic of her eyes, pausing at times with prettily knit brows, and her penholder between her lips, in the semblance of a pout that was pleasant enough to see. Suddenly the rattle of hoofs and wheels struck her with the sense of something forgotten, and she put down her work quickly and stood up listening. The sound of rough voices and her

father's querulous accents was broken upon by a cultivated and more familiar utterance, "All right; I'll speak to her at once. Wait there," and the door opened to the well-known physician of Burnt Ridge, Dr. Duchesne.

"Look here," he said, with an abruptness that was only saved from being brusque by a softer intonation and a reassuring smile, "I met Miguel helping an accident into your buggy. Your orders, eh?"

"Oh yes," said Josephine quietly. "A man I saw on the road."

"Well, it's a bad case, and wants prompt attention. And as your house is the nearest I came with him here."

"Certainly," she said gravely. "Take him to the second room beyond — Steve's room — it's ready," she explained to two dusky shadows in the hall behind the doctor.

"And look here," said the doctor, partly closing the door behind him and regarding her with critical eyes, "you always said you'd like to see some of my queer cases. Well, this is one — a serious one, too; in fact, it's just touch and go with him. There's a piece of the bone pressing on the brain no bigger than that, but as much as if all Burnt Ridge was atop of him! I'm going to lift it. I want somebody here to stand by, some one who can lend a hand with a sponge, eh? — some one who is n't going to faint or scream, or even shake a hair's-breadth, eh?"

The color rose quickly to the girl's cheek, and her eyes kindled. "I'll come," she said thoughtfully. "Who is he?"

The doctor stared slightly at the unessential query. "Don't know, — one of the river miners, I reckon. It's an urgent case. I'll go and get everything ready. You'd better," he added, with an ominous glance at her gray frock, "put something over your dress." The suggestion made her grave, but did not alter her color.

A moment later she entered the room. It was the one

that had always been set apart for her brother: the very bed on which the unconscious man lay had been arranged that morning with her own hands. Something of this passed through her mind as she saw that the docter had wheeled it beneath the strong light in the centre of the room, stripped its outer coverings with professional thoughtfulness, and rearranged the mattresses. But it did not seem like the same room. There was a pungent odor in the air from some freshly opened vial; an almost feminine neatness and luxury in an open morocco case like a jewel box on the table, shining with spotless steel. At the head of the bed one of her own servants, the powerful mill foreman, was assisting with the mingled curiosity and *blasé* experience of one accustomed to smashed and lacerated digits. At first she did not look at the central unconscious figure on the bed, whose sufferings seemed to her to have been vicariously transferred to the concerned, eager, and drawn faces that looked down upon its immunity. Then she femininely recoiled before the bared white neck and shoulders displayed above the quilt, until, forcing herself to look upon the face half-concealed by bandages and the head from which the dark tangles of hair had been ruthlessly sheared, she began to share the doctor's unconcern in his personality. What mattered who or what *he* was? It was — a case!

The operation began. With the same earnest intelligence that she had previously shown, she quickly and noiselessly obeyed the doctor's whispered orders, and even half anticipated them. She was conscious of a singular curiosity that, far from being mean or ignoble, seemed to lift her not only above the ordinary weaknesses of her own sex, but made her superior to the men around her. Almost before she knew it, the operation was over, and she regarded with equal curiosity the ostentatious solicitude with which the doctor seemed to be wiping his fateful instrument that bore an odd resemblance to a silver-handled

centre-bit. The stertorous breathing below the bandages had given way to a fainter but more natural respiration. There was a moment of suspense. The doctor's hand left the pulse and lifted the closed eyelid of the sufferer. A slight movement passed over the figure. The sluggish face had cleared; life seemed to struggle back into it before even the dull eyes participated in the glow. Dr. Duchesne with a sudden gesture waved aside his companions, but not before Josephine had bent her head eagerly forward.

"He is coming to," she said.

At the sound of that deep clear voice — the first to break the hush of the room — the dull eyes leaped up, and the head turned in its direction. The lips moved and uttered a single rapid sentence. The girl recoiled.

"You 're all right now," said the doctor cheerfully, intent only upon the form before him.

The lips moved again, but this time feebly and vacantly; the eyes were staring vaguely around.

"What 's matter? What 's all about?" said the man thickly.

"You 've had a fall. Think a moment. Where do you live?"

Again the lips moved, but this time only to emit a confused, incoherent murmur. Dr. Duchesne looked grave, but recovered himself quickly.

"That will do. Leave him alone now," he said brusquely to the others.

But Josephine lingered.

"He spoke well enough just now," she said eagerly. "Did you hear what he said?"

"Not exactly," said the doctor abstractedly, gazing at the man.

"He said, 'You 'll have to kill me first,'" said Josephine slowly.

"Humph," said the doctor, passing his hand backwards

and forwards before the man's eyes to note any change in the staring pupils.

"Yes," continued Josephine gravely. "I suppose," she added cautiously, "he was thinking of the operation — of what you had just done to him?"

"What *I* had done to him? Oh yes!"

CHAPTER II

Before noon the next day it was known throughout Burnt Ridge Valley that Dr. Duchesne had performed a difficult operation upon an unknown man, who had been picked up unconscious from a fall, and carried to Burnt Ridge Ranch. But although the unfortunate man's life was saved by the operation, he had only momentarily recovered consciousness — relapsing into a semi-idiotic state, which effectively stopped the discovery of any clue to his friends or his identity. As it was evidently an *accident*, which, in that rude community — and even in some more civilized ones — conveyed a vague impression of some contributary incapacity on the part of the victim, or some providential interference of a retributive character, Burnt Ridge gave itself little trouble about it. It is unnecessary to say that Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth gave themselves and Josephine much more. They had a theory and a grievance. Satisfied from the first that the alleged victim was a drunken tramp, who had submitted to have a hole bored in his head in order to foist himself upon the ranch, they were loud in their protests, even hinting at a conspiracy between Josephine and the stranger to supplant her brother in the property, as he had already in the spare bedroom. "Did n't all that yer happen *the very night* she pretended to go for Stephen — eh ?" said Mrs. Forsyth. "Tell me that! And did n't she have it all arranged with the buggy to bring him here, as that sneaking doctor let out — eh ? Looks mighty curious, don't it ?" she muttered darkly to the old man. But although that gentleman, even from

his own selfish view, would scarcely have submitted to a surgical operation and later idiocy as the price of insuring comfortable dependency, he had no doubt others were base enough to do it, and lent a willing ear to his wife's suspicions.

Josephine's personal knowledge of the stranger went little further. Dr. Duchesne had confessed to her his professional disappointment at the incomplete results of the operation. He had saved the man's life, but as yet not his reason. There was still hope, however, for the diagnosis revealed nothing that might prejudice a favorable progress. It was a most interesting case. He would watch it carefully, and as soon as the patient could be removed would take him to the county hospital, where, under his own eyes, the poor fellow would have the benefit of the latest science and the highest specialists. Physically, he was doing remarkably well; indeed, he must have been a fine young chap, free from blood taint or vicious complication, whose flesh had healed like an infant's. It should be recorded that it was at this juncture that Mrs. Forsyth first learnt that a *silver plate* let into the artful stranger's skull was an adjunct of the healing process! Convinced that this infamous extravagance was part and parcel of the conspiracy, and was only the beginning of other assimilations of the Forsyths' metallic substance; that the plate was probably polished and burnished with a fulsome inscription to the doctor's skill, and would pass into the possession and adornment of a perfect stranger, her rage knew no bounds. He or his friends ought to be made to pay for it or work it out! In vain it was declared that a few dollars were all that was found in the man's pocket, and that no memoranda gave any indication of his name, friends, or history beyond the suggestion that he came from a distance. This was clearly a part of the conspiracy! Even Josephine's practical good sense was obliged to take note of this

singular absence of all record regarding him, and the apparent obliteration of everything that might be responsible for his ultimate fate.

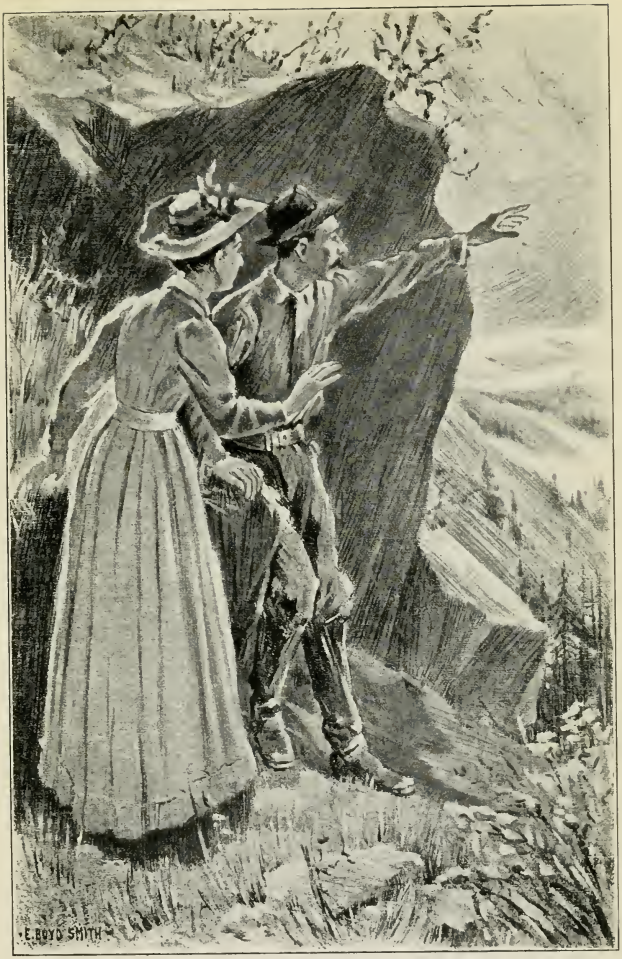
Homeless, friendless, helpless, and even nameless, the unfortunate man of twenty-five was thus left to the tender mercies of the mistress of Burnt Ridge Ranch, as if he had been a new-born foundling laid at her door. But this mere claim of weakness was not all; it was supplemented by a singular personal appeal to Josephine's nature. From the time that he turned his head towards her voice on that fateful night, his eyes had always followed her around the room with a wondering, yearning, canine half-intelligence. Without being able to convince herself that he understood her better than his regular attendant furnished by the doctor, she could not fail to see that he obeyed her implicitly, and that whenever any difficulty arose between him and his nurse she was always appealed to. Her pride in this proof of her practical sovereignty was flattered; and when Dr. Duchesne finally admitted that although the patient was now physically able to be removed to the hospital, yet he would lose in the change that very strong factor which Josephine had become in his mental recovery, the young girl as frankly suggested that he should stay as long as there was any hope of restoring his reason. Dr. Duchesne was delighted. With all his enthusiasm for science, he had a professional distrust of some of its disciples, and perhaps was not sorry to keep this most interesting case in his own hands. To him her suggestion was only a womanly kindness, tempered with womanly curiosity. But the astonishment and stupefaction of her parents at this evident corroboration of suspicions they had as yet only half believed was tinged with superstitious dread. Had she fallen in love with this helpless stranger? or, more awful to contemplate, was he really no stranger, but a surreptitious lover thus strategically brought under her

roof? For once they refrained from open criticism. The very magnitude of their suspicions left them dumb.

It was thus that the virgin Chatelaine of Burnt Ridge Ranch was left to gaze untrammeled upon her pale and handsome guest, whose silken, bearded lips and sad, child-like eyes might have suggested a more Exalted Sufferer in their absence of any suggestion of a grosser material manhood. But even this imaginative appeal did not enter into her feelings. She felt for her good-looking, helpless patient a profound and honest pity. I do not know whether she had ever heard that "pity was akin to love." She would probably have resented that utterly untenable and atrocious commonplace. There was no suggestion, real or illusive, of any previous masterful quality in the man which might have made his present dependent condition picturesque by contrast. He had come to her handicapped by an unromantic accident and a practical want of energy and intellect. He would have to touch her interest anew if, indeed, he would ever succeed in dispelling the old impression. His beauty, in a community of picturesquely handsome men, had little weight with her, except to accent the contrast with their fuller manhood.

Her life had given her no illusions in regard to the other sex. She had found them, however, more congenial and safer companions than women, and more accessible to her own sense of justice and honor. In return, they had respected and admired rather than loved her, in spite of her womanly graces. If she had at times contemplated eventual marriage, it was only as a possible practical partnership in her business; but as she lived in a country where men thought it dishonorable and a proof of incompetency to rise by their wives' superior fortune, she had been free from that kind of mercenary persecution, even from men who might have worshiped her in hopeless and silent honor.

For this reason, there was nothing in the situation that



FURTHER STILL

suggested a single compromising speculation in the minds of the neighbors, or disturbed her own tranquillity. There seemed to be nothing in the future except a possible relief to her curiosity. Some day the unfortunate man's reason would be restored, and he would tell his simple history. Perhaps he might explain what was in his mind when he turned to her the first evening with that singular sentence which had often recurred strangely to her, she knew not why. It did not strike her until later that it was because it had been the solitary indication of an energy and capacity that seemed unlike him. Nevertheless, after that explanation, she would have been quite willing to have shaken hands with him and parted.

And yet — for there was an unexpressed remainder in her thought — she was never entirely free or uninfluenced in his presence. The flickering vacancy of his sad eyes sometimes became fixed with a resolute immobility under the gentle questioning with which she had sought to draw out his faculties, that both piqued and exasperated her. He could say "Yes" and "No," as she thought, intelligently, but he could not utter a coherent sentence nor write a word, except like a child in imitation of his copy. She taught him to repeat after her the names of the inanimate objects in the room, then the names of the doctor, his attendant, the servant, and, finally, her own under her Christian prenomen, with frontier familiarity; but when she pointed to himself he waited for *her* to name him! In vain she tried him with all the masculine names she knew; his was not one of them, or he would not or could not speak it. For at times she rejected the professional dictum of the doctor that the faculty of memory was wholly paralyzed or held in abeyance, even to the half-automatic recollection of his letters, yet she inconsistently began to teach him the alphabet with the same method, and — in her sublime unconsciousness of his manhood — with the same discipline as if he

were a very child. When he had recovered sufficiently to leave his room, she would lead him to the porch before her window, and make him contented and happy by allowing him to watch her at work at her desk, occasionally answering his wondering eyes with a word, or stirring his faculties with a question. I grieve to say that her parents had taken advantage of this publicity and his supposed helpless condition to show their disgust of his assumption, to the extreme of making faces at him — an act which he resented with such a furious glare that they retreated hurriedly to their own veranda. A fresh though somewhat inconsistent grievance was added to their previous indictment of him: "If we ain't found dead in our bed with our throats cut by that woman's crazy husband" (they had settled by this time that there had been a clandestine marriage), "we'll be lucky," groaned Mrs. Forsyth.

Meantime, the mountain summer waxed to its fullness of fire and fruition. There were days when the crowded forest seemed choked and impeded with its own foliage, and pungent and stifling with its own rank maturity; when the long hillside ranks of wild oats, thick-set and impassable, filled the air with the heated dust of germination. In this quickening irritation of life it would be strange if the unfortunate man's torpid intellect was not helped in its awakening, and he was allowed to ramble at will over the ranch; but with the instinct of a domestic animal he always returned to the house, and sat in the porch, where Josephine usually found him awaiting her when she herself returned from a visit to the mill. Coming thence one day she espied him on the mountain side leaning against a projecting ledge in an attitude so rapt and immovable that she felt compelled to approach him. He appeared to be dumbly absorbed in the prospect, which might have intoxicated a saner mind.

Half veiled by the heat that rose quiveringly from the fiery cañon below, the domain of Burnt Ridge stretched

away before him, until, lifted in successive terraces hearsed and plumed with pines, it was at last lost in the ghostly snow-peaks. But the practical Josephine seized the opportunity to try once more to awaken the slumbering memory of her pupil. Following his gaze with signs and questions, she sought to draw from him some indication of familiar recollection of certain points of the map thus unrolled behind him. But in vain. She even pointed out the fateful shadow of the overhanging ledge on the road where she had picked him up — there was no response in his abstracted eyes. She bit her lips; she was becoming irritated again. Then it occurred to her that, instead of appealing to his hopeless memory, she had better trust to some unreflective automatic instinct independent of it, and she put the question a little forward: "When you leave us, where will you go from here?" He stirred slightly, and turned towards her. She repeated her query slowly and patiently, with signs and gestures recognized between them. A faint glow of intelligence struggled into his eyes; he lifted his arm slowly, and pointed.

"Ah! those white peaks — the Sierras?" she asked eagerly. No reply. "Beyond them?"

"Yes."

"The States?" No reply. "Further still?"

He remained so patiently quiet and still pointing that she leaned forward, and following with her eyes the direction of his hand, saw that he was pointing to the sky!

Then a great quiet fell upon them. The whole mountain side seemed to her to be hushed, as if to allow her to grasp and realize for the first time the pathos of the ruined life at her side, which *it* had known so long, but which she had never felt till now. The tears came to her eyes; in her swift revulsion of feeling she caught the thin uplifted hand between her own. It seemed to her that he was about to raise them to his lips, but she withdrew them hastily, and

moved away. She had a strange fear that if he had kissed them, it might seem as if some dumb animal had touched them — or — *it might not.* The next day she felt a consciousness of this in his presence, and a wish that he was well cured and away. She determined to consult Dr. Duchesne on the subject when he next called.

But the doctor, secure in the welfare of his patient, had not visited him lately, and she found herself presently absorbed in the business of the ranch, which at this season was particularly trying. There had also been a quarrel between Dick Shipley, her mill foreman, and Miguel, her ablest and most trusted vaquero, and in her strict sense of impartial justice she was obliged to side on the merits of the case with Shipley against her oldest retainer. This troubled her, as she knew that with the Mexican nature, fidelity and loyalty were not unmixed with quick and unreasoning jealousy. For this reason she was somewhat watchful of the two men when work was over, and there was a chance of their being thrown together. Once or twice she had remained up late to meet Miguel returning from the posada at San Ramon, filled with aguardiente and a recollection of his wrongs, and to see him safely bestowed before she herself retired. It was on one of those occasions, however, that she learned that Dick Shipley, hearing that Miguel had disparaged him freely at the posada, had broken the discipline of the ranch, and absented himself the same night that Miguel "had leave," with a view of facing his antagonist on his own ground. To prevent this, the fearless girl at once secretly set out alone to overtake and bring back the delinquent.

For two or three hours the house was thus left to the sole occupancy of Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth and the invalid — a fact only dimly suspected by the latter, who had become vaguely conscious of Josephine's anxiety, and had noticed the absence of light and movement in her room. For this

reason, therefore, having risen again and mechanically taken his seat in the porch to await her return, he was startled by hearing *her* voice in the shadow of the lower porch, accompanied by a hurried tapping against the door of the old couple. The half-reasoning man arose, and would have moved towards it, but suddenly he stopped rigidly, with white and parted lips and vacantly distended eyeballs.

Meantime the voice and muffled tapping had brought the tremulous fingers of old Forsyth to the door-latch. He opened the door partly; a slight figure that had been lurking in the shadow of the porch pushed rapidly through the opening. There was a faint outcry quickly hushed, and the door closed again. The rays of a single candle showed the two old people hysterically clasping in their arms the figure that had entered — a slight but vicious-looking young fellow of five-and-twenty.

"There, d—n it!" he said impatiently in a voice whose rich depth was like Josephine's, but whose querulous action was that of the two old people before him, "let me go, and quit that. I did n't come here to be strangled! I want some money, — money, you hear! Devilish quick, too, for I 've got to be off again before daylight. So look sharp, will you?"

"But, Stevy dear, when you did n't come that time three months ago, but wrote from Los Angeles, you said you 'd made a strike at last, and" —

"What are you talking about?" he interrupted violently. "That was just my lyin' to keep you from worryin' me. Three months ago — three months ago! Why, you must have been crazy to have swallowed it; I had n't a cent."

"Nor have we," said the old woman shrilly. "That hellish sister of yours still keeps us like beggars. Our only hope was you, our own boy. And now you only come to — to go again."

"But *she* has money; *she's* doing well, and *she* shall give it to me," he went on angrily. "She can't bully me with her business airs and morality. Who else has got a right to share, if it is not her own brother?"

Alas for the fatuousness of human malevolence! Had the unhappy couple related only the simple facts they knew about the new guest of Burnt Ridge Ranch, and the manner of his introduction, they might have spared what followed.

But the old woman broke into a vindictive cry: "Who else, Steve — who else? Why, the slut has brought a *man* here — a sneaking, deceitful, underhanded, crazy lover!"

"Oh, has she?" said the young man fiercely, yet secretly pleased at this promising evidence of his sister's human weakness. "Where is she? I'll go to her. She's in her room, I suppose," and before they could restrain him, he had thrown off their impending embraces and darted across the hall.

The two old people stared doubtfully at each other. For even this powerful ally, whose strength, however, they were by no means sure of, might succumb before the determined Josephine! Prudence demanded a middle course. "Ain't they brother and sister?" said the old man, with an air of virtuous toleration. "Let 'em fight it out."

The young man impatiently entered the room he remembered to have been his sister's. By the light of the moon that streamed upon the window he could see she was not there. He passed hurriedly to the door of her bedroom; it was open; the room was empty, the bed unturned. She was not in the house — she had gone to the mill. Ah! What was that they had said? An infamous thought passed through the scoundrel's mind. Then, in what he half believed was an access of virtuous fury, he began by the dim light to rummage in the drawers of the desk for

such loose coin or valuables as, in the perfect security of the ranch, were often left unguarded. Suddenly he heard a heavy footstep on the threshold, and turned.

An awful vision — a recollection, so unexpected, so ghost-like in that weird light that he thought he was losing his senses — stood before him. It moved forwards with staring eyeballs and white and open lips from which a horrible inarticulate sound issued that was the speech of no living man! With a single desperate, almost superhuman effort, Stephen Forsyth bounded aside, leaped from the window, and ran like a madman from the house. Then the apparition trembled, collapsed, and sank in an undistinguishable heap to the ground.

When Josephine Forsyth returned an hour later with her mill foreman, she was startled to find her helpless patient in a fit on the floor of her room. With the assistance of her now converted and penitent employee, she had the unfortunate man conveyed to his room — but not until she had thoughtfully rearranged the disorder of her desk and closed the open drawers without attracting Dick Shipley's attention. In the morning, hearing that the patient was still in the semi-conscious exhaustion of his late attack, but without seeing him, she sent for Dr. Duchesne. The doctor arrived while she was absent at the mill, where, after a careful examination of his patient, he sought her with some little excitement.

"Well?" she said, with eager gravity.

"Well, it looks as if your wish would be gratified. Your friend has had an epileptic fit, but the physical shock has started his mental machinery again. He has recovered his faculties; his memory is returning; he thinks and speaks coherently; he is as sane as you and I."

"And" — said Josephine, questioning the doctor's knitted eyebrows.

"I am not yet sure whether it was the result of some

shock he does n't remember; or an irritation of the brain, which would indicate that the operation had not been successful, and that there was still some physical pressure or obstruction there — in which case he would be subject to these attacks all his life."

"Do you think his reason came before the fit or after?" asked the girl anxiously.

"I could n't say. Had anything happened?"

"I was away, and found him on the floor on my return," she answered, half uneasily. After a pause, she said, "Then he has told you his name and all about himself?"

"Yes, it 's nothing at all! He was a stranger just arrived from the States, going to the mines — the old story; had no near relations, of course; was n't missed or asked after; remembers walking along the ridge and falling over; name, John Baxter, of Maine." He paused, and relaxing into a slight smile, added, "I have n't spoiled your romance, have I?"

"No," she said, with an answering smile. Then as the doctor walked briskly away she slightly knitted her pretty brows, hung her head, patted the ground with her little foot beyond the hem of her gown, and said to herself, "The man was lying to him."

CHAPTER III

On her return to the house, Josephine apparently contented herself with receiving the bulletin of the stranger's condition from the servant, for she did not enter his room. She had obtained no theory of last night's incident from her parents, who, beyond a querulous agitation that was quickened by the news of his return to reason, refrained from even that insidious comment which she half feared would follow. When another day passed without seeing him, she nevertheless was conscious of a little embarrassment when his attendant brought her the request that she would give him a moment's speech in the porch, whither he had been removed.

She found him physically weaker; indeed, so much so that she was fain, even in her embarrassment, to assist him back to the bench from which he had ceremoniously risen. But she was so struck with the change in his face and manner, a change so virile and masterful, in spite of its gentle sadness of manner, that she recoiled with a slight timidity as if he had been a stranger, although she was also conscious that he seemed to be more at his ease than she was. He began in a low exhausted voice, but before he had finished his first sentence, she felt herself in the presence of a superior.

"My thanks come very late, Miss Forsyth," he said, with a faint smile, "but no one knows better than yourself the reason why, or can better understand that they mean that the burden you have so generously taken on yourself is about to be lifted. I know all, Miss Forsyth.

Since yesterday I have learned how much I owe you, even my life I believe, though I am afraid I must tell you in the same breath that *that* is of little worth to any one. You have kindly helped and interested yourself in a poor stranger who turns out a nobody, without friends, without romance, and without even mystery. You found me lying in the road down yonder, after a stupid accident that might have happened to any other careless tramp, and which scarcely gave me a claim to a bed in the county hospital, much less under this kindly roof. It was not my fault, as you know, that all this did not come out sooner; but while it does n't lessen your generosity, it does n't lessen my debt, and although I cannot hope to ever repay you, I can at least keep the score from running on. Pardon my speaking so bluntly, but my excuse for speaking at all was to say 'Good-by' and 'God bless you.' Dr. Duchesne has promised to give me a lift on my way in his buggy when he goes."

There was a slight touch of consciousness in his voice in spite of its sadness, which struck the young girl as a weak and even ungentlemanly note in his otherwise self-abnegating and undemonstrative attitude. If he was a common tramp, he would n't talk in that way, and if he was n't, why did he lie? Her practical good sense here asserted itself.

"But you are far from strong yet; in fact, the doctor says you might have a relapse at any moment, and you have — that is, you *seem* to have no money," she said gravely.

"That 's true," he said quickly. "I remember I was quite played out when I entered the settlement, and I think I had parted from even some little trifles I carried with me. I am afraid I was a poor find to those who picked me up, and you ought to have taken warning. But the doctor has offered to lend me enough to take me to San Francisco, if

only to give a fair trial to the machine he has set once more a-going."

"Then you have friends in San Francisco?" said the young girl quickly. "Those who know you? Why not write to them first, and tell them you are here?"

"I don't think your postmaster here would be preoccupied with letters for John Baxter, if I did," he said quietly. "But here is the doctor waiting. Good-by."

He stood looking at her in a peculiar, yet half-resigned way, and held out his hand. For a moment she hesitated. Had he been less independent and strong, she would have refused to let him go — have offered him some slight employment at the ranch; for oddly enough, in spite of the suspicion that he was concealing something, she felt that she would have trusted him, and he would have been a help to her. But he was not only determined, but *she* was all the time conscious that he was a totally different man from the one she had taken care of, and merely ordinary prudence demanded that she should know something more of him first. She gave him her hand constrainedly; he pressed it warmly.

Dr. Duchesne drove up, helped him into the buggy, smiled a good-natured but half-perfunctory assurance that he would look after "her patient," and drove away.

The whole thing was over, but so unexpectedly, so suddenly, so unromantically, so unsatisfactorily, that, although her common sense told her that it was perfectly natural, proper, businesslike, and reasonable, and, above all, final and complete, she did not know whether to laugh or be angry. Yet this was her parting from the man who had but a few days ago moved her to tears with a single hopeless gesture. Well, this would teach her what to expect. Well, what had she expected? Nothing!

Yet for the rest of the day she was unreasonably irritable, and, if the conjointure be not paradoxical, severely practical,

and inhumanly just. Falling foul of some presumption of Miguel's, based upon his prescriptive rights through long service on the estate, with the recollection of her severity towards his antagonist in her mind, she rated that trusted retainer with such pitiless equity and unfeminine logic that his hot Latin blood chilled in his veins, and he stood livid on the road. Then, informing Dick Shipley with equally relentless calm that she might feel it necessary to change *all* her foremen unless they could agree in harmony, she sought the dignified seclusion of her castle. But her respected parents, whose triumphant relief at the stranger's departure had emboldened them to await her return in their porch with bended bows of invective and lifted javelins of aggression, recoiled before the resistless helm of this cold-browed Minerva, who galloped contemptuously past them.

Nevertheless, she sat late that night at her desk. The cold moon looked down upon her window, and lit up the empty porch where her silent guest had mutely watched her. For a moment she regretted that he had recovered his reason, excusing herself on the practical ground that he would never have known his dependence, and he would have been better cared for by her. She felt restless and uneasy. This slight divergence from the practical groove in which her life had been set had disturbed her in many other things, and given her the first views of the narrowness of it.

Suddenly she heard a step in the porch. The lateness of the hour, perhaps some other reason, seemed to startle her, and she half rose. The next moment the figure of Miguel appeared at the doorway, and with a quick, hurried look around him, and at the open window, he approached her. He was evidently under great excitement, his hollow shaven cheek looked like a waxen effigy in the Mission church; his yellow, tobacco-stained eye glittered like phosphorescent amber, his lank gray hair was damp and perspir-

ing; but more striking than this was the evident restraint he had put upon himself, pressing his broad-brimmed sombrero with both of his trembling yellow hands against his breast. The young girl cast a hurried glance at the open window and at the gun which stood in the corner, and then confronted him with clear and steady eyes, but a paler cheek.

Ah, he began in Spanish, which he himself had taught her as a child, it was a strange thing, his coming there to-night; but, then, mother of God! it was a strange, a terrible thing that she had done to him — old Miguel, her uncle's servant: he that had known her as a muchacha; he that had lived all his life at the ranch — ay, and whose fathers before him had lived there all *their* lives and driven the cattle over the very spot where she now stood, before the thieving Americans came here! But he would be calm; yes, the señora should find him calm, even as she was when she told him to go. He would not speak. No, he — Miguel — would contain himself; yes, he *had* mastered himself, but could he restrain others? Ah, yes, *others* — that was it. Could he keep Manuel and Pepe and Dominguez from talking to the milkman — that leaking sieve, that gabbling brute of a Shipley, for whose sake she had cast off her old servant that very day?

She looked at him with cold astonishment, but without fear. Was he drunk with aguardiente, or had his jealousy turned his brain? He continued gasping, but still pressing his hat against his breast.

Ah, he saw it all! Yes, it was to-day, the day he left. Yes, she had thought it safe to cast Miguel off now — now that *he* was gone!

Without in the least understanding him, the color had leaped to her cheek, and the consciousness of it made her furious.

"How dare you?" she said passionately. "What has that stranger to do with my affairs or your insolence?"

He stopped and gazed at her with a certain admiring loyalty. "Ah! so," he said, with a deep breath, "the señora is the niece of her uncle. She does well not to fear *him* — a dog," — with a slight shrug, — "who is more than repaid by the señora's condescension. *He* dare not speak!"

"Who dare not speak? Are you mad?" She stopped with a sudden terrible instinct of apprehension. "Miguel," she said in her deepest voice, "answer me, I command you! Do you know anything of this man?"

It was Miguel's turn to recoil from his mistress. "Ah, my God! is it possible the señora has not suspect?"

"Suspect!" said Josephine haughtily, albeit her proud heart was beating quickly. "I *suspect* nothing. I command you to tell me what you *know*."

Miguel turned with a rapid gesture and closed the door. Then, drawing her away from the window, he said in a hurried whisper: —

"I know that that man has not the name of Baxter! I know that he has the name of Randolph, a young gambler, who have won a large sum at Sacramento, and, fearing to be robbed by those he won of, have walk to himself through the road in disguise of a miner. I know that your brother Esteban have decoyed him here, and have fallen on him."

"Stop!" said the young girl, her eyes, which had been fixed with the agony of conviction, suddenly flashing with the energy of despair. "And you call yourself the servant of my uncle, and dare say this of his nephew?"

"Yes, señora," broke out the old man passionately. "It is because I am the servant of your uncle that I, and I *alone*, dare say it to you! It is because I perjured my soul, and have perjured my soul to deny it elsewhere, that I now dare to say it! It is because I, your servant, knew it from one of my countrymen, who was of the gang, —

because I, Miguel, knew that your brother was not far away that night, and because I, whom you would dismiss, have picked up this pocket-book of Randolph's and your brother's ring which he have dropped, and I have found beneath the body of the man you sent me to fetch." He drew a packet from his bosom, and tossed it on the desk before her.

"And why have you not told me this before?" said Josephine passionately.

Miguel shrugged his shoulders.

"What good? Possibly this dog Randolph would die. Possibly he would live — as a lunatic. Possibly would happen what has happened! The señora is beautiful. The American has eyes. If the Doña Josephine's beauty shall finish what the silly Don Esteban's arm have begun — what matter?"

"Stop!" cried Josephine, pressing her hands across her shuddering eyes. Then, uncovering her white and set face, she said rapidly, "Saddle my horse and your own at once. Then take your choice! Come with me and repeat all that you have said in the presence of that man, or leave this ranch forever. For if I live I shall go to him to-night, and tell the whole story."

The old man cast a single glance at his mistress, shrugged his shoulders, and, without a word, left the room. But in ten minutes they were on their way to the county town.

Day was breaking over the distant Burnt Ridge — a faint, ghostly level, like a funeral pall, in the dim horizon — as they drew up before the gaunt, white-painted pile of the hospital building. Josephine uttered a cry. Dr. Duchesne's buggy was before the door. On its very threshold they met the doctor, dark and irritated. "Then you heard the news?" he said quickly.

Josephine turned her white face to the doctor's. "What news?" she asked in a voice that seemed strangely deep and resonant.

"The poor fellow had another attack last night, and died of exhaustion about an hour ago. I was too late to save him."

"Did he say anything? Was he conscious?" asked the girl hoarsely.

"No; incoherent! Now I think of it, he harped on the same string as he did the night of the operation. What was it he said? you remember."

"'You 'll have to kill me first,'" repeated Josephine in a choking voice.

"Yes; something about his dying before he 'd tell. Well, he came back to it before he went off — they often do. You seem a little hoarse with your morning ride. You should take care of that voice of yours. By the way, it 's a good deal like your brother's."

. . . . . .

The Chatelaine of Burnt Ridge never married.

A MÆCENAS OF THE PACIFIC SLOPE

CHAPTER I

As Mr. Robert Rushbrook, known to an imaginative press as the "Mæcenas of the Pacific Slope," drove up to his country seat, equally referred to as a "palatial villa," he cast a quick but practical look at the pillared pretensions of that enormous shell of wood and paint and plaster. The statement, also a reportorial one, that its site, the Cañon of Los Osos, "some three years ago was disturbed only by the passing tread of bear and wildcat," had lost some of its freshness as a picturesque apology, and already successive improvements on the original building seemingly cast the older part of the structure back to a hoary antiquity. To many it stood as a symbol of everything Robert Rushbrook did or had done — an improvement of all previous performances; it was like his own life — an exciting though irritating state of transition to something better. Yet the visible architectural result, as here shown, was scarcely harmonious; indeed, some of his friends — and Mæcenas had many — professed to classify the various improvements by the successive fortunate ventures in their owner's financial career, which had led to new additions, under the names of "The Comstock Lode Period," "The Union Pacific Renaissance," "The Great Wheat Corner," and "Water Front Gable Style," a humorous trifling that did not, however, prevent a few who were artists from accepting Mæcenas's liberal compensation for their services in giving shape to those ideas.

Relinquishing to a groom his fast-trotting team, the second relay in his two hours' drive from San Francisco, he leaped to the ground to meet the architect, already awaiting his orders in the courtyard. With his eyes still fixed upon the irregular building before him, he mingled his greeting and his directions.

"Look here, Barker, we 'll have a wing thrown out here, and a hundred-foot ballroom. Something to hold a crowd; something that can be used for music — sabe? — a concert, or a show."

"Have you thought of any style, Mr. Rushbrook?" suggested the architect.

"No," said Rushbrook; "I 've been thinking of the time — thirty days, and everything to be in. You 'll stop to dinner. I 'll have you sit near Jack Somers. You can talk style to him. Say I told you."

"You wish it completed in thirty days?" repeated the architect dubiously.

"Well, I should n't mind if it were less. You can begin at once. There 's a telegraph in the house. Patrick will take any message, and you can send up to San Francisco and fix things before dinner."

Before the man could reply, Rushbrook was already giving a hurried interview to the gardener and others on his way to the front porch. In another moment he had entered his own hall, — a wonderful temple of white and silver plaster, formal, yet friable like the sugared erection of a wedding-cake, — where his major-domo awaited him.

"Well, who 's here?" asked Rushbrook, still advancing towards his apartments.

"Dinner is set for thirty, sir," said the functionary, keeping step demurely with his master, "but Mr. Appleby takes ten over to San Mateo, and some may sleep there. The *char-à-banc* is still out and five saddle-horses, to a picnic in Green Cañon, and I can't positively say, but I should think

you might count on seeing about forty-five guests before you go to town to-morrow. The opera troupe seem to have not exactly understood the invitation, sir."

"How? I gave it myself."

"The chorus and supernumeraries thought themselves invited too, sir, and have come, I believe, sir. At least Signora Pegrelli and Madame Denise said so, and that they would speak to you about it, but that meantime I could put them up anywhere."

"And you made no distinction, of course?"

"No, sir, I put them in the corresponding rooms opposite, sir. I don't think the prima donnas like it."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir."

Whatever was in their minds, the two men never changed their steady, practical gravity of manner. The major-domo's appeared to be a subdued imitation of his master's, worn, as he might have worn his master's clothes, had he accepted, or Mr. Rushbrook permitted, such a degradation. By this time they had reached the door of Mr. Rushbrook's room, and the man paused. "I did n't include some guests of Mr. Leyton's, sir, that he brought over here to show around the place, but he told me to tell you he would take them away again, or leave them, as you liked. They 're some Eastern strangers stopping with him."

"All right," said Rushbrook quietly, as he entered his own apartment. It was decorated as garishly as the hall, as staring and vivid in color, but wholesomely new and clean for all its paint, veneering, and plaster. It was filled with heterogeneous splendor — all new and well kept, yet with so much of the attitude of the show-room still lingering about it that one almost expected to see the various articles of furniture ticketed with their prices. A luxurious bed, with satin hangings and Indian carved posts, standing ostentatiously in a corner, kept up this resem-

blance, for in a curtained recess stood a worn camp bedstead, Rushbrook's real couch, Spartan in its simplicity.

Mr. Rushbrook drew his watch from his pocket, and deliberately divested himself of his boots, coat, waistcoat, and cravat. Then rolling himself in a fleecy, blanket-like rug with something of the habitual dexterity of a frontiersman, he threw himself on his couch, closed his eyes, and went instantly to sleep. Lying there, he appeared to be a man comfortably middle-aged, with thick iron-gray hair that might have curled had he encouraged such inclination; a skin roughened and darkened by external hardships and exposure, but free from taint of inner vice or excess, and indistinctive features redeemed by a singularly handsome mouth. As the lower part of the face was partly hidden by a dense but closely cropped beard, it is probable that the delicate outlines of his lips had gained something from their framing.

He slept, through what seemed to be the unnatural stillness of the large house, — a quiet that might have come from the lingering influence of the still virgin solitude around it, as if Nature had forgotten the intrusion, or were stealthily retaking her own; and later, through the rattle of returning wheels or the sound of voices, which were, however, promptly absorbed in that deep and masterful silence which was the unabdicating genius of the cañon. For it was remarkable that even the various artists, musicians, orators, and poets whom Mæcenas had gathered in his cool business fashion under that roof, all seemed to become, by contrast with surrounding Nature, as new and artificial as the house, and as powerless to assert themselves against its influence.

He was sleeping when James reëntered the room, but awoke promptly at the sound of his voice. In a few moments he had rearranged his scarcely disordered toilet, and

stepped out refreshed and observant into the hall. The guests were still absent from that part of the building, and he walked leisurely past the carelessly opened doors of the rooms they had left. Everywhere he met the same glaring ornamentation and color, the same garishness of treatment, the same inharmonious extravagance of furniture, and everywhere the same troubled acceptance of it by the inmates, or the same sense of temporary and restricted tenancy. Dresses were hung over cheval-glasses; clothes piled up on chairs to avoid the use of doubtful and over ornamented wardrobes, and in some cases more practical guests had apparently encamped in a corner of their apartment. A gentleman from Siskyou — sole proprietor of a mill patent now being considered by Mæcenas — had confined himself to a rocking-chair and clothes-horse as being trustworthy and familiar; a bolder spirit from Yreka — in treaty for capital to start an independent journal devoted to Mæcenas's interests — had got a good deal out of, indeed all he had *into*, a Louis XVI. *armoire;* while a young painter from Sacramento had simply retired into his adjoining bathroom, leaving the glories of his bedroom untarnished. Suddenly he paused.

He had turned into a smaller passage in order to make a shorter cut through one of the deserted suites of apartments that should bring him to that part of the building where he designed to make his projected improvement, when his feet were arrested on the threshold of a sitting-room. Although it contained the same decoration and furniture as the other rooms, it looked totally different! It was tasteful, luxurious, comfortable, and habitable. The furniture seemed to have fallen into harmonious position; even the staring decorations of the walls and ceiling were toned down by sprays of laurel and red-stained manzanita boughs with their berries, apparently fresh plucked from the new cañon.

But he was more unexpectedly impressed to see that the room was at that moment occupied by a tall, handsome girl, who had paused to take breath, with her hand still on the heavy centre-table she was moving. Standing there, graceful, glowing, and animated, she looked the living genius of the recreated apartment.

CHAPTER II

Mr. Rushbrook glanced rapidly at his unknown guest. "Excuse me," he said, with respectful business brevity, "but I thought every one was out," and he stepped backward quickly.

"I 've only just come," she said without embarrassment, "and would you mind, as you *are* here, giving me a lift with this table ? "

"Certainly," replied Rushbrook, and under the young girl's direction the millionaire moved the table to one side.

During the operation he was trying to determine which of his unrecognized guests the fair occupant was. Possibly one of the Leyton party, that James had spoken of as impending.

"Then you have changed all the furniture, and put up these things ? " he asked, pointing to the laurel.

"Yes, the room was really something *too* awful. It looks better now, don't you think ? "

"A hundred per cent.," said Rushbrook promptly. "Look here, I 'll tell you what you 've done. You 've set the furniture *to work !* It was simply lying still — with no return to anybody on the investment."

The young girl opened her gray eyes at this, and then smiled. The intruder seemed to be characteristic of California. As for Rushbrook, he regretted that he did not know her better; he would at once have asked her to rearrange all the rooms, and have managed in some way liberally to reward her for it. A girl like that had no nonsense about her.

"Yes," she said, "I wonder Mr. Rushbrook don't look at it in that way. It is a shame that all these pretty things — and you know they are really good and valuable — should n't show what they are. But I suppose everybody here accepts the fact that this man simply buys them because they are valuable, and nobody interferes, and is content to humor him, laugh at him, and feel superior. It don't strike me as quite fair, does it you?"

Rushbrook was pleased. Without the vanity that would be either annoyed at this revelation of his reputation or gratified at her defense of it, he was simply glad to discover that she had not recognized him as her host, and could continue the conversation unreservedly. "Have you seen the ladies' boudoir?" he asked. "You know, the room fitted with knickknacks and pretty things — some of 'em bought from old collections in Europe, by fellows who knew what they were; but perhaps," he added, looking into her eyes for the first time, "did n't know exactly what ladies cared for."

"I merely glanced in there when I first came, for there was such a queer lot of women — I 'm told he is n't very particular in that way — that I did n't stay."

"And you did n't think *they* might be just as valuable and good as some of the furniture, if they could have been pulled around and put into shape, or set in a corner, eh?"

The young girl smiled; she thought her fellow guest rather amusing, none the less so, perhaps, for catching up her own ideas, but nevertheless she slightly shrugged her shoulders with that hopeless skepticism which women reserve for their own sex. "Some of them looked as if they had been pulled around, as you say, and had n't been improved by it."

"There 's no one there now," said Rushbrook, with practical directness; "come and take a look at it." She complied without hesitation, walking by his side, tall, easy,

and self-possessed, apparently accepting without self-consciousness his half-paternal, half-comrade-like informality. The boudoir was a large room, repeating on a bigger scale the incongruousness and ill-fitting splendor of the others. When she had of her own accord recognized and pointed out the more admirable articles, he said, gravely looking at his watch, "We 've just about seven minutes yet; if you 'd like to pull and haul these things around, I 'll help you."

The young girl smiled. "I 'm quite content with what I 've done in my own room, where I have no one's taste to consult but my own. I hardly know how Mr. Rushbrook, or his lady friends, might like my operating here." Then recognizing with feminine tact the snub that might seem implied in her refusal, she said quickly, "Tell me something about our host — but first look! is n't that pretty?"

She had stopped before the window that looked upon the dim blue abyss of the cañon, and was leaning out to gaze upon it. Rushbrook joined her.

"There is n't much to be changed down *there*, is there?" he said, half interrogatively.

"No, not unless Mr. Rushbrook took it into his head to roof it in, and somebody was ready with a contract to do it. But what do you know of him? Remember, I 'm quite a stranger here."

"You came with Charley Leyton?"

"With *Mrs.* Leyton's party," said the young girl, with a half-smiling emphasis. "But it seems that we don't know whether Mr. Rushbrook wants us here or not, till he comes. And the drollest thing about it is that they 're all so perfectly frank in saying so."

"Charley and he are old friends, and you 'll do well to trust to their judgment."

This was hardly the kind of response that the handsome and clever society girl before him had been in the habit of receiving, but it amused her. Her fellow guest was decid-

edly original. But he had n't told her about Rushbrook, and it struck her that his opinion would be independent, at least. She reminded him of it.

"Look here," said Rushbrook, "you 'll meet a man here to-night — or he 'll be sure to meet *you* — who 'll tell you all about Rushbrook. He 's a smart chap, knows everybody and talks well. His name is Jack Somers; he is a great ladies' man. He can talk to you about these sort of things, too," — indicating the furniture with a half-tolerant, half-contemptuous gesture, that struck her as inconsistent with what seemed to be his previous interest, — "just as well as he can talk of people. Been in Europe, too."

The young girl's eye brightened with a quick vivacity at the name, but a moment after became reflective and slightly embarrassed. "I know him — I met him at Mr. Leyton's. He has already talked of Mr. Rushbrook, but," she added, avoiding any conclusion, with a pretty pout, "I 'd like to have the opinion of others. Yours, now, I fancy would be quite independent."

"You stick to what Jack Somers has said, good or bad, and you won't be far wrong," he said assuringly. He stopped; his quick ear had heard approaching voices; he returned to her and held out his hand. As it seemed to her that in California everybody shook hands with everybody else on the slightest occasions, sometimes to save further conversation, she gave him her own. He shook it, less forcibly than she had feared, and abruptly left her. For a moment she was piqued at this superior and brusque way of ignoring her request, but reflecting that it might be the awkwardness of an untrained man, she dismissed it from her mind. The voices of her friends in the already resounding passages also recalled her to the fact that she had been wandering about the house with a stranger, and she rejoined them a little self-consciously.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Leyton gayly, "it seems

we are to stay. Leyton says Rushbrook won't hear of our going."

"Does that mean that your husband takes the whole opera troupe over to your house in exchange?"

"Don't be satirical, but congratulate yourself on your opportunity of seeing an awfully funny gathering. I would n't have you miss it for the world. It 's the most characteristic thing out."

"Characteristic of what?"

"Of Rushbrook, of course. Nobody else would conceive of getting together such a lot of queer people."

"But don't it strike you that we 're a part of the lot?"

"Perhaps," returned the lively Mrs. Leyton. "No doubt that 's the reason why Jack Somers is coming over, and is so anxious that *you* should stay. I can't imagine why else he should rave about Miss Grace Nevil as he does. Come, Grace, no New York or Philadelphia airs, here! Consider your uncle's interests with this capitalist, to say nothing of ours. Because you 're a millionaire and have been accustomed to riches from your birth, don't turn up your nose at our unpampered appetites. Besides, Jack Somers is Rushbrook's particular friend, and he may think your criticisms unkind."

"But *is* Mr. Somers such a great friend of Mr. Rushbrook's?" asked Grace Nevil.

"Why, of course. Rushbrook consults him about all these things; gives him *carte blanche* to invite whom he likes and order what he likes, and trusts his taste and judgment implicitly."

"Then this gathering is Mr. Somers's selection?"

"How preposterous you are, Grace. Of course not. Only Somers's *idea* of what is pleasing to Rushbrook, gotten up with a taste and discretion all his own. You know Somers is a gentleman, educated at West Point — traveled all over Europe — you might have met him there; and Rushbrook

— well, you have only to see him to know what *he* is. Don't you understand?"

A slight seriousness; the same shadow that once before darkened the girl's charming face gave way to a mischievous knitting of her brows as she said naïvely, "No."

CHAPTER III

Grace Nevil had quite recovered her equanimity when the indispensable Mr. Somers, handsome, well-bred, and self-restrained, approached her later in the crowded drawing-room. Blended with his subdued personal admiration was a certain ostentation of respect — as of a tribute to a distinguished guest — that struck her. "I am to have the pleasure of taking you in, Miss Nevil," he said. "It 's my one compensation for the dreadful responsibility just thrust upon me. Our host has been suddenly called away, and I am left to take his place."

Miss Nevil was slightly startled. Nevertheless, she smiled graciously. "From what I hear this is no new function of yours; that is, if there really *is* a Mr. Rushbrook. I am inclined to think him a myth."

"You make me wish he were," retorted Somers gallantly; "but as I could n't reign at all except in his stead, I shall look to you to lend your rightful grace to my borrowed dignity."

The more general announcement to the company was received with a few perfidious regrets from the more polite, but with only amused surprise by the majority. Indeed, many considered it "characteristic" — "so like Bob Rushbrook" — and a few enthusiastic friends looked upon it as a crowning and intentional stroke of humor. It remained, however, for the gentleman from Siskyou to give the incident a subtlety that struck Miss Nevil's fancy. "It reminds me," he said in her hearing, "of ole Kernel Frisbee, of Robertson County, one of the purlitest men I ever struck.

When he knew a feller was very dry, he 'd jest set the decanter afore him, and managed to be called outer the room on bus'ness. Now, Bob Rushbrook 's about as white a man as that. He 's jest the feller, who, knowing you and me might feel kinder restrained about indulging our appetites afore him, kinder drops out easy, and leaves us alone." And she was impressed by an instinct that the speaker really felt the delicacy he spoke of, and that it left no sense of inferiority behind.

The dinner, served in a large, brilliantly lit saloon, that in floral decoration and gilded columns suggested an ingenious blending of a steamboat *table d'hôte* and "harvest home," was perfect in its *cuisine*, even if somewhat extravagant in its proportions.

"I should be glad to receive the salary that Rushbrook pays his *chef*, and still happier to know how to earn it as fairly," said Somers to his fair companion.

"But is his skill entirely appreciated here ?" she asked.

"Perfectly," responded Somers. "Our friend from Siskyou over there appreciates that *pâté* which he cannot name as well as I do. Rushbrook himself is the only exception, yet I fancy that even *his* simplicity and regularity in feeding is as much a matter of business with him as any defect in his earlier education. In his eyes, his *chef's* greatest qualification is his promptness and fertility. Have you noticed that ornament before you ?" pointing to an elaborate confection. "It bears your initials, you see. It was conceived and executed since you arrived — rather, I should say, since it was known that you would honor us with your company. The greatest difficulty encountered was to find out what your initials were."

"And I suppose," mischievously added the young girl to her acknowledgments, "that the same fertile mind which conceived the design eventually provided the initials ?"

"That is our secret," responded Somers, with affected gravity.

The wines were of characteristic expensiveness, and provoked the same general comment. Rushbrook seldom drank wine; Somers had selected it. But the barbaric opulence of the entertainment culminated in the Californian fruits, piled in pyramids on silver dishes, gorgeous and unreal in their size and painted beauty, and the two Divas smiled over a basket of grapes and peaches as outrageous in dimensions and glaring color as any pasteboard banquet at which they had professionally assisted. As the courses succeeded each other, under the exaltation of wine, conversation became more general as regarded participation, but more local and private as regarded the subject, until Miss Nevil could no longer follow it. The interests of that one, the hopes of another, the claims of a third, in affairs that were otherwise uninteresting, were all discussed with singular youthfulness of trust that to her alone seemed remarkable. Not that she lacked entertainment from the conversation of her clever companion, whose confidences and criticisms were very pleasant to her; but she had a gentlewoman's instinct that he talked to her too much, and more than was consistent with his duties as the general host. She looked around the table for her singular acquaintance of an hour before, but she had not seen him since. She would have spoken about him to Somers, but she had an instinctive idea that the latter would be antipathetic, in spite of the stranger's flattering commendation. So she found herself again following Somers's cynical but good-humored description of the various guests, and, I fear, seeing with his eyes, listening with his ears, and occasionally participating in his superior attitude. The "fearful joy" she had found in the novelty of the situation and the originality of the actors seemed now quite right from this critical point of view. So she learned how the guest with the long hair was an unknown painter, to whom Rushbrook had given a commission for three hundred yards of

painted canvas, to be cut up and framed as occasion and space required, in Rushbrook's new hotel in San Francisco; how the gray-bearded foreigner near him was an accomplished bibliophile who was furnishing Mr. Rushbrook's library from spoils of foreign collections, and had suffered unheard-of agonies from the millionaire's insisting upon a handsome uniform binding that should deprive certain precious but musty tomes of their crumbling, worm-eaten coverings; how the very gentle, clerical-looking stranger, mildest of a noisy, disputing crowd at the other table, was a notorious duelist and dead shot; how the only gentleman at the table who retained a flannel shirt and high boots was not a late-coming mountaineer, but a well-known English baronet on his travels; how the man who told a somewhat florid and emphatic anecdote was a popular Eastern clergyman; how the one querulous, discontented face in a laughing group was the famous humorist who had just convulsed it; and how a pale, handsome young fellow, who ate and drank sparingly and disregarded the coquettish advances of the prettiest *Diva* with the cold abstraction of a student, was a notorious *roué* and gambler. But there was a sudden and unlooked-for change of criticism and critic.

The festivity had reached that stage when the guests were more or less accessible to emotion, and more or less touched by the astounding fact that every one was enjoying himself. This phenomenon, which is apt to burst into song or dance among other races, is constrained to voice itself in an Anglo-Saxon gathering by some explanation, apology, or moral — known as an after-dinner speech. Thus it was that the gentleman from Siskyou, who had been from time to time casting glances at Somers and his fair companion at the head of the table, now rose to his feet, albeit unsteadily, pushed back his chair, and began: —

"'Pears to me, ladies and gentlemen, and feller pardners, that on an occasion like this, suthin' oughter be said of the

man who got it up — whose money paid for it, and who ain't here to speak for himself, except by deputy. Yet you all know that 's Bob Rushbrook's style — he ain't here, because he 's full of some other plan or improvements — and it 's like him to start suthin' of this kind, give it its aim and purpose, and then stand aside to let somebody else run it for him. There ain't no man livin' ez hez, so to speak, more fast horses ready saddled for riding, and more fast men ready spurred to ride 'em, — whether to win his races or run his errands. There ain't no man livin' ez knows better how to make other men's games his, or his game seem to be other men's. And from Jack Somers smilin' over there, ez knows where to get the best wine that Bob pays for, and knows how to run this yer show for Bob, at Bob's expense — we 're all contented. Ladies and gentlemen, we 're all contented. We stand, so to speak, on the cards he 's dealt us. What may be his little game, it ain't for us to say; but whatever it is, *we 're in it.* Gentlemen and ladies, we 'll drink Bob's health ! "

There was a somewhat sensational pause, followed by good-natured laughter and applause, in which Somers joined; yet not without a certain constraint that did not escape the quick sympathy of the shocked and unsmiling Miss Nevil. It was with a feeling of relief that she caught the chaperoning eye of Mrs. Leyton, who was entreating her in the usual mysterious signal to the other ladies to rise and follow her. When she reached the drawing-room, a little behind the others, she was somewhat surprised to observe that the stranger whom she had missed during the evening was approaching her with Mrs. Leyton.

"Mr. Rushbrook returned sooner than he expected, but unfortunately, as he always retires early, he has only time to say 'good-night' to you before he goes."

For an instant Grace Nevil was more angry than disconcerted. Then came the conviction that she was stupid not

to have suspected the truth before. Who else would that brusque stranger develop into but this rude host? She bowed formally.

Mr. Rushbrook looked at her with the faintest smile on his handsome mouth.

"Well, Miss Nevil, I hope Jack Somers satisfied your curiosity?"

With a sudden recollection of the Siskyou gentleman's speech, and a swift suspicion that in some way she had been made use of with the others by this forceful-looking man before her, she answered pertly: —

"Yes; but there was a speech by a gentleman from Siskyou that struck me as being nearer to the purpose."

"That's so — I heard it as I came in," said Mr. Rushbrook calmly. "I don't know but you 're right."

CHAPTER IV

Six months had passed. The Villa of Mæcenas was closed at Los Osos Cañon, and the southwest trade-winds were slanting the rains of the wet season against its shut windows and barred doors. Within that hollow, deserted shell, its aspect — save for a single exception — was unchanged; the furniture and decorations preserved their eternal youth undimmed by time; the rigidly arranged rooms, now closed to life and light, developed more than ever their resemblance to a furniture warehouse. The single exception was the room which Grace Nevil had rearranged for herself; and that, oddly enough, was stripped and bare — even to its paper and mouldings.

In other respects, the sealed treasures of Rushbrook's villa, far from provoking any sentimentality, seemed only to give truth to the current rumor that it was merely waiting to be transformed into a gorgeous watering-place hotel under Rushbrook's direction; that, with its new ballroom changed into an elaborate dining-hall, it would undergo still further improvement, the inevitable end and object of all Rushbrook's enterprise; and that its former proprietor had already begun another villa whose magnificence should eclipse the last. There certainly appeared to be no limit to the millionaire's success in all that he personally undertook, or in his fortunate complicity with the enterprise and invention of others. His name was associated with the oldest and safest schemes, as well as the newest and boldest — with an equal guarantee of security. A few, it was true, looked doubtingly upon this "one man power," but could not refute the fact that

others had largely benefited by association with him, and that he shared his profits with a royal hand. Some objected on higher grounds to his brutalizing the influence of wealth by his material and extravagantly practical processes, instead of the gentler suggestions of education and personal example, and were impelled to point out the fact that he and his patronage were vulgar. It was felt, however, by those who received his benefits, that a proper sense of this inferiority was all that ethics demanded of them. One could still accept Rushbrook's barbaric gifts by humorously recognizing the fact that he didn't know any better, and that it pleased him, as long as they resented any higher pretensions.

The rain-beaten windows of Rushbrook's town house, however, were cheerfully lit that December evening. Mr. Rushbrook seldom dined alone; in fact, it was popularly alleged that very often the unfinished business of the day was concluded over his bountiful and perfect board. He was dressing as James entered the room.

"Mr. Leyton is in your study, sir; he will stay to dinner."

"All right."

"I think, sir," added James, with respectful suggestiveness, "he wants to talk. At least, sir, he asked me if you would likely come downstairs before your company arrived."

"Ah! Well, tell the others I'm dining on *business*, and set dinner for two in the blue room."

"Yes, sir."

Meanwhile, Mr. Leyton — a man of Rushbrook's age, but not so fresh and vigorous-looking — had thrown himself in a chair beside the study fire, after a glance around the handsome and familiar room. For the house had belonged to a brother millionaire; it had changed hands with certain shares of "Water Front," — as some of Rushbrook's dealings had the true barbaric absence of money detail, —

and was elegantly and tastefully furnished. The cuckoo had, however, already laid a few characteristic eggs in this adopted nest, and a white marble statue of a nude and ill-fed Virtue, sent over by Rushbrook's Paris agent, and unpacked that morning, stood in one corner, and materially brought down the temperature. A Japanese praying-throne of pure ivory, and, above it, a few yards of improper, colored exposure by an old master, equalized each other.

"And what is all this affair about the dinner?" suddenly asked a tartly pitched female voice with a foreign accent.

Mr. Leyton turned quickly, and was just conscious of a faint shriek, the rustle of a skirt, and the swift vanishing of a woman's figure from the doorway. Mr. Leyton turned red. Rushbrook lived *en garçon*, with feminine possibilities; Leyton was a married man and a deacon. The incident which, to a man of the world, would have brought only a smile, fired the inexperienced Leyton with those exaggerated ideas and intense credulity regarding vice common to some very good men. He walked on tiptoe to the door, and peered into the passage. At that moment Rushbrook entered from the opposite door of the room.

"Well," said Rushbrook, with his usual practical directness, "what do you think of her?"

Leyton, still flushed, and with eyebrows slightly knit, said, awkwardly, that he had scarcely seen her.

"She cost me already ten thousand dollars, and I suppose I'll have to eventually fix up a separate room for her somewhere," continued Rushbrook.

"I should certainly advise it," said Leyton quickly, "for really, Rushbrook, you know that something is due to the respectable people who come here, and any of them are likely to see" —

"Ah!" interrupted Rushbrook seriously, "you think she has n't got on clothes enough. Why, look here, old

man — she 's one of the Virtues, and that 's the rig in which they always travel. She 's a 'Temperance' or a 'Charity' or a 'Resignation,' or something of that kind. You 'll find her name there in French somewhere at the foot of the marble."

Leyton saw his mistake, but felt — as others sometimes felt — a doubt whether this smileless man was not inwardly laughing at him. He replied, with a keen, rapid glance at his host: —

"I was referring to some woman who stood in that doorway just now, and addressed me rather familiarly, thinking it was you."

"Oh, the Signora," said Rushbrook, with undisturbed directness; "well, you saw her at Los Osos last summer. Likely she *did* think you were me."

The cool ignoring of any ulterior thought in Leyton's objection forced the guest to be equally practical in his reply.

"Yes, but the fact is Miss Nevil had talked of coming here with me this evening to see you on her own affairs, and it would n't have been exactly the thing for her to meet that woman."

"She would n't," said Rushbrook promptly; "nor would *you*, if you had gone into the parlor as Miss Nevil would have done. But look here! If that 's the reason why you did n't bring her, send for her at once; my coachman can take a card from you; the brougham 's all ready to fetch her, and there you are. She 'll see only you and me." He was already moving towards the bell, when Leyton stopped him.

"No matter now. I can tell you her business, I fancy; and, in fact, I came here to speak of it, quite independently of her."

"That won't do, Leyton," interrupted Rushbrook, with crisp decision. "One or the other interview is unnecessary;

it wastes time, and is n't business. Better have her present, even if she don't say a word."

"Yes, but not in this matter," responded Leyton; "it 's about Somers. You know he 's been very attentive to her ever since her uncle left her here to recruit her health, and I think she fancies him. Well, although she 's independent and her own mistress, as you know, Mrs. Leyton and I are somewhat responsible for her acquaintance with Somers, — and for that matter so are you; and as my wife thinks it means a marriage, we ought to know something more positive about Somers's prospects. Now, all we really know is that he 's a great friend of yours; that you trust a good deal to him; that he manages your social affairs; that you treat him as a son or nephew, and it 's generally believed that he 's as good as provided for by you — eh? Did you speak?"

"No," said Rushbrook, quietly regarding the statue as if taking its measurement for a suitable apartment for it. "Go on."

"Well," said Leyton, a little impatiently, "that 's the belief everybody has, and you 've not contradicted it. And on that we 've taken the responsibility of not interfering with Somers's attentions."

"Well?" said Rushbrook interrogatively.

"Well," replied Leyton emphatically, "you see I must ask you positively if you *have* done anything, or are you going to do anything for him?"

"Well," replied Rushbrook, with exasperating coolness, "what do you call this marriage?"

"I don't understand you," said Leyton.

"Look here, Leyton," said Rushbrook, suddenly and abruptly facing him; "Jack Somers has brains, knowledge of society, tact, accomplishments, and good looks: that 's *his* capital as much as mine is money. I employ him: that 's his advertisement, recommendation, and credit.

Now, on the strength of this, as you say, Miss Nevil is willing to invest in him ; I don't see what more can be done."

"But if her uncle don't think it enough ? "

"She 's independent, and has money for both."

"But if she thinks she 's been deceived, and changes her mind ? "

"Leyton, you don't know Miss Nevil. Whatever that girl undertakes she 's weighed fully, and goes through with. If she 's trusted him enough to marry him, money won't stop her ; if she thinks she 's been deceived, *you 'll* never know it."

The enthusiasm and conviction were so unlike Rushbrook's usual cynical toleration of the sex that Leyton stared at him.

"That 's odd," he returned. "That 's what she says of you."

"Of *me ;* you mean Somers ? "

"No, of *you.* Come, Rushbrook, don't pretend you don't know that Miss Nevil is a great partisan of yours, swears by you, says you 're misunderstood by people, and, what 's infernally odd in a woman who don't belong to the class you fancy, don't talk of your habits. That 's why she wants to consult you about Somers, I suppose, and that 's why, knowing you might influence her, I came here first to warn you."

"And I 've told you that whatever I might say or do would n't influence her. So we 'll drop the subject."

"Not yet ; for you 're bound to see Miss Nevil sooner or later. Now, if she knows that you 've done nothing for this man, your friend and her lover, won't she be justified in thinking that you would have a reason for it ? "

"Yes. I should give it."

"What reason ? "

"That I knew she 'd be more contented to have him speculate with *her* money than mine."

"Then you think that he is n't a business man ? "

"I think that she thinks so, or she would n't marry him ; it 's part of the attraction. But come, James has been for five minutes discreetly waiting outside the door to tell us dinner is ready, and the coast clear of all other company. But look here," he said, suddenly stopping, with his arm in Leyton's, "you 're through your talk, I suppose ; perhaps you 'd rather we 'd dine with the Signora and the others than alone ? "

For an instant Leyton thrilled with the fascination of what he firmly believed was a guilty temptation. Rushbrook, perceiving his hesitation, added : —

"By the way, Somers is of the party, and one or two others you know."

Mr. Leyton opened his eyes widely at this ; either the temptation had passed, or the idea of being seen in doubtful company by a younger man was distasteful, for he hurriedly disclaimed any preference. "But," he added with half-significant politeness, "perhaps I 'm keeping *you* from them ? "

"It makes not the slightest difference to me," calmly returned Rushbrook, with such evident truthfulness that Leyton was both convinced and chagrined.

Preceded by the grave and ubiquitous James, they crossed the large hall, and entered through a smaller passage a charming apartment hung with blue damask, which might have been a boudoir, study, or small reception-room, yet had the air of never having been anything continuously. It would seem that Rushbrook's habit of "camping out" in different parts of his mansion obtained here as at Los Osos, and with the exception of a small closet which contained his Spartan bed, the rooms were used separately or in suites, as occasion or his friends required. It is recorded that an Eastern guest, newly arrived with letters to Rushbrook, after a tedious journey, expressed himself pleased

with this same blue room, in which he had sumptuously dined with his host, and subsequently fell asleep in his chair. Without disturbing his guest, Rushbrook had the table removed, a bed, washstand, and bureau brought in, the sleeping man delicately laid upon the bed, and left to awaken to an Arabian Night's realization of his wish.

CHAPTER V

James had barely disposed of his master and Mr. Leyton, and left them to the ministrations of two of his underlings, before he was confronted with one of those difficult problems that it was part of his functions to solve. The porter informed him that a young lady had just driven up in a carriage ostensibly to see Mr. Rushbrook, and James, descending to the outer vestibule, found himself face to face with Miss Grace Nevil. Happily, that young lady, with her usual tact, spared him some embarrassment.

"Oh! James," she said sweetly, "do you think that I could see Mr. Rushbrook for a few moments *if I waited for the opportunity?* You understand, I don't wish to disturb him or his company by being regularly announced."

The young girl's practical intelligence appeared to increase the usual respect which James had always shown her. "I understand, miss." He thought for a moment, and said: "Would you mind, then, following me where you could wait quietly and alone?" As she quickly assented, he preceded her up the staircase, past the study and drawing-room, which he did not enter, and stopped before a small door at the end of the passage. Then, handing her a key which he took from his pocket, he said: "This is the only room in the house that is strictly reserved for Mr. Rushbrook, and even he rarely uses it. You can wait here without anybody knowing it until I can communicate with him and bring you to his study unobserved. And," he hesitated, "if you would n't mind locking the door when you are in, miss, you would be more secure, and I will knock when I come for you."

Grace Nevil smiled at the man's prudence, and entered the room. But to her great surprise, she had scarcely shut the door when she was instantly struck with a singular memory which the apartment recalled. It was exactly like the room she had altered in Rushbrook's villa at Los Osos! More than that, on close examination it proved to be the very same furniture, arranged as she remembered to have arranged it, even to the flowers and grasses, now, alas! faded and withered on the walls. There could be no mistake. There was the open ebony *escritoire* with the satin blotter open, and its leaves still bearing the marks of her own handwriting. So complete to her mind was the idea of her own tenancy in this bachelor's mansion, that she looked around with a half-indignant alarm for the photograph or portrait of herself that might further indicate it. But there was no other exposition. The only thing that had been added was a gilt legend on the satin case of the blotter, — "Los Osos, August 20, 186–," the day she had occupied the room.

She was pleased, astonished, but more than all, disturbed. The only man who might claim a right to this figurative possession of her tastes and habits was the one whom she had quietly, reflectively, and understandingly half accepted as her lover, and on whose account she had come to consult Rushbrook. But Somers was not a sentimentalist; in fact, as a young girl, forced by her independent position to somewhat critically scrutinize masculine weaknesses, this had always been a point in his favor; yet even if he had joined with his friend Rushbrook to perpetuate the memory of their first acquaintanceship, his taste merely would not have selected a *chambre de garçon* in Mr. Rushbrook's home for its exhibition. Her conception of the opposite characters of the two men was singularly distinct and real, and this momentary confusion of them was disagreeable to her woman's sense. But at this moment James came to release

her and conduct her to Rushbrook's study, where he would join her at once. Everything had been arranged as she had wished.

Even a more practical man than Rushbrook might have lingered over the picture of the tall, graceful figure of Miss Nevil, quietly enthroned in a large armchair by the fire, her scarlet, satin-lined cloak thrown over its back, and her chin resting on her hand. But the millionaire walked directly towards her with his usual frankness of conscious but restraining power, and she felt, as she always did, perfectly at her ease in his presence. Even as she took his outstretched hand, its straightforward grasp seemed to endow her with its own confidence.

"You'll excuse my coming here so abruptly," she smiled, "but I wanted to get before Mr. Leyton, who, I believe, wishes to see you on the same business as myself."

"He is here already, and dining with me," said Rushbrook.

"Ah! does he know I am here?" asked the girl quietly.

"No; as he said you had thought of coming with him and did n't, I presumed you did n't care to have him know you had come alone."

"Not exactly that, Mr. Rushbrook," she said, fixing her beautiful eyes on him in bright and trustful confidence, "but I happen to have a fuller knowledge of this business than he has, and yet as it is not altogether my own secret, I was not permitted to divulge it to him. Nor would I tell it to you, only I cannot bear that you should think that I had anything to do with this wretched inquisition into Mr. Somers's prospects. Knowing as well as you do how perfectly independent I am, you would think it strange, would n't you? But you would think it still more surprising when you found out that I and my uncle already know how liberally and generously you had provided for Mr. Somers in the future."

"How I had provided for Mr. Somers in the future?" repeated Mr. Rushbrook, looking at the fire, "eh?"

"Yes," said the young girl indifferently, "how you were to put him in to succeed you in the Water Front Trust, and all that. He told it to me and my uncle at the outset of our acquaintance, confidentially, of course, and I dare say with an honorable delicacy that was like him, but — I suppose now you will think me foolish — all the while I 'd rather he had not."

"You 'd rather he had not," repeated Mr. Rushbrook slowly.

"Yes," continued Grace, leaning forward with her rounded elbows on her knees, and her slim, arched feet on the fender. "Now you are going to laugh at me, Mr. Rushbrook, but all this seemed to me to spoil any spontaneous feeling I might have towards him, and limit my independence in a thing that should be a matter of free will alone. It seemed too much like a business proposition! There, my kind friend!" she added, looking up and trying to read his face with a half-girlish pout, followed, however, by a maturer sigh, "I 'm bothering you with a woman's foolishness instead of talking business. And" — another sigh — "I suppose it *is* business; for my uncle, who has, it seems, bought into this Trust on these possible contingencies, has, perhaps, been asking questions of Mr. Leyton. But I don't want you to think that I approve of them, or advise your answering them. But you are not listening."

"I had forgotten something," said Rushbrook, with an odd preoccupation. "Excuse me a moment — I will return at once."

He left the room quite as abstractedly, and when he reached the passage, he apparently could not remember what he had forgotten, as he walked deliberately to the end window, where, with his arms folded behind his back, he remained looking out into the street. A passer-by, glancing up,

might have said he had seen the pale, stern ghost of Mr. Rushbrook, framed like a stony portrait in the window. But he presently turned away, and reëntered the room, going up to Grace, who was still sitting by the fire, in his usual strong and direct fashion.

"Well! Now let me see what you want. I think this would do."

He took a seat at the open desk, and rapidly wrote a few lines. "There," he continued, "when you write to your uncle, inclose that."

Grace took it, and read: —

DEAR MISS NEVIL, — Pray assure your uncle from me that I am quite ready to guarantee, in any form that he may require, the undertaking represented to him by Mr. John Somers. Yours very truly,

ROBERT RUSHBROOK.

A quick flush mounted to the young girl's cheeks. "But this is a *security*, Mr. Rushbrook," she said proudly, handing him back the paper, "and my uncle does not require that. Nor shall I insult him or you by sending it."

"It is *business*, Miss Nevil," said Rushbrook gravely. He stopped, and fixed his eyes upon her animated face and sparkling eyes. "You can send it to him or not, as you like. But" — a rare smile came to his handsome mouth — "as this is a letter to *you*, you must not insult *me* by not accepting it."

Replying to his smile rather than the words that accompanied it, Miss Nevil smiled, too. Nevertheless, she was uneasy and disturbed. The interview, whatever she might have vaguely expected from it, had resolved itself simply into a business indorsement of her lover, which she had not sought, and which gave her no satisfaction. Yet there was the same potent and indefinably protecting presence before

her which she had sought, but whose omniscience and whose help she seemed to have lost the spell and courage to put to the test. He relieved her in his abrupt but not unkindly fashion. "Well, when is it to be?"

"It?"

"Your marriage."

"Oh, not for some time. There 's no hurry."

It might have struck the practical Mr. Rushbrook that, even considered as a desirable business affair, the prospective completion of this contract provoked neither frank satisfaction nor conventional dissimulation on the part of the young lady, for he regarded her calm but slightly wearied expression fixedly. But he only said, "Then I shall say nothing of this interview to Mr. Leyton?"

"As you please. It really matters little. Indeed, I suppose I was rather foolish in coming at all and wasting your valuable time for nothing."

She had risen, as if taking his last question in the significance of a parting suggestion, and was straightening her tall figure, preparatory to putting on her cloak. As she reached it, he stepped forward, and lifted it from the chair to assist her. The act was so unprecedented, as Mr. Rushbrook never indulged in those minor masculine courtesies, that she was momentarily as confused as a younger girl at the gallantry of a younger man. In their previous friendship he had seldom drawn near her except to shake her hand — a circumstance that had always recurred to her when his free and familiar life had been the subject of gossip. But she now had a more frightened consciousness that her nerves were strangely responding to his powerful propinquity, and she involuntarily contracted her pretty shoulders as he gently laid the cloak upon them. Yet even when the act was completed, she had a superstitious instinct that the significance of this rare courtesy was that it was final, and that he had helped her to interpose something that shut him out from her forever.

She was turning away with a heightened color, when the sound of light, hurried footsteps and the rustle of a woman's dress were heard in the hall. A swift recollection of her companion's infelicitous reputation now returned to her, and Grace Nevil, with a slight stiffening of her whole frame, became coldly herself again. Mr. Rushbrook betrayed neither surprise nor agitation. Begging her to wait a moment until he could arrange for her to pass to her carriage unnoticed, he left the room.

Yet it seemed that the cause of the disturbance was unsuspected by Mr. Rushbrook. Mr. Leyton, although left to the consolation of cigars and liquors in the blue room, had become slightly weary of his companion's prolonged absence. Satisfied in his mind that Rushbrook had joined the gayer party, and that he was even now paying gallant court to the Signora, he became again curious and uneasy. At last the unmistakable sound of whispering voices in the passage got the better of his sense of courtesy as a guest, and he rose from his seat, and slightly opened the door. As he did so the figures of a man and woman, conversing in earnest whispers, passed the opening. The man's arm was round the woman's waist; the woman's was — as he had suspected — the one who had stood in the doorway, the Signora — but — the man was *not* Rushbrook. Mr. Leyton drew back this time in unaffected horror. It was none other than Jack Somers!

Some warning instinct must at that moment have struck the woman, for with a stifled cry she disengaged herself from Somers's arm, and dashed rapidly down the hall. Somers, evidently unaware of the cause, stood irresolute for a moment, and then more silently but swiftly disappeared into a side corridor as if to intercept her. It was the rapid passage of the Signora that had attracted the attention of Grace and Rushbrook in the study, and it was the moment after it that Mr. Rushbrook left.

CHAPTER VI

VAGUELY uneasy, and still perplexed with her previous agitation, as Mr. Rushbrook closed the door behind him, Grace, following some feminine instinct rather than any definite reason, walked to the door and placed her hand upon the lock to prevent any intrusion until he returned. Her caution seemed to be justified a moment later, for a heavier but stealthier footstep halted outside. The handle of the door was turned, but she resisted it with the fullest strength of her small hand until a voice, which startled her, called in a hurried whisper : —

" Open quick, 't is I."

She stepped back quickly, flung the door open, and beheld Somers on the threshold !

The astonishment, agitation, and, above all, the awkward confusion of this usually self-possessed and ready man were so unlike him, and withal so painful, that Grace hurried to put an end to it, and for an instant forgot her own surprise at seeing him. She smiled assuringly, and extended her hand.

" Grace — Miss Nevil — I beg your pardon — I did n't imagine " — he began, with a forced laugh. " I mean, of course — I cannot — but " — He stopped, and then assuming a peculiar expression, said : " But what are *you* doing here ? "

At any other moment the girl would have resented the tone, which was as new to her as his previous agitation, but in her present self-consciousness her situation seemed to require some explanation. " I came here," she said, " to

see Mr. Rushbrook on business. Your business — *our* business," she added, with a charming smile, using for the first time the pronoun that seemed to indicate their unity and interest, and yet fully aware of a vague insincerity in doing so.

"Our *business?*" he repeated, ignoring her gentler meaning with a changed emphasis and a look of suspicion.

"Yes," said Grace, a little impatiently. "Mr. Leyton thought he ought to write to my uncle something positive as to your prospects with Mr. Rushbrook, and" —

"You came here to inquire?" said the young man sharply.

"I came here to stop any inquiry," said Grace indignantly. "I came here to say *I* was satisfied with what you had confided to me of Mr. Rushbrook's generosity, and that was enough!"

"With what *I* had confided to you? You dared say that?"

Grace stopped, and instantly faced him. But any indignation she might have felt at his speech and manner was swallowed up in the revulsion and horror that overtook her with the sudden revelation she saw in his white and frightened face. Leyton's strange inquiry, Rushbrook's cold composure and scornful acceptance of her own credulousness, came to her in a flash of shameful intelligence. Somers had lied! The insufferable meanness of it! A lie, whose very uselessness and ignobility had defeated its purpose — a lie that implied the basest suspicion of her own independence and truthfulness — such a lie now stood out as plainly before her as his guilty face.

"Forgive my speaking so rudely," he said, with a forced smile and attempt to recover his self-control, "but you have ruined me unless you deny that I told you anything. It was a joke — an extravagance that I had forgotten; at least, it was a confidence between you and me that you

have foolishly violated. Say that you misunderstood me — that it was a fancy of your own. Say anything — he trusts you — he 'll believe anything you say."

"He *has* believed me," said Grace, almost fiercely, turning upon him with the paper that Rushbrook had given her in her outstretched hand. "Read that!"

He read it. Had he blushed, had he stammered, had he even kept up his former frantic and pitiable attitude, she might at that supreme moment have forgiven him. But to her astonishment his face changed, his handsome brow cleared, his careless, happy smile returned, his graceful confidence came back — he stood before her the elegant, courtly, and accomplished gentleman she had known. He returned her the paper, and advancing with extended hand, said triumphantly: —

"Superb! Splendid! No one but a woman could think of that! And only one woman achieve it. You have tricked the great Rushbrook. You are indeed worthy of being a financier's wife!"

"No," she said passionately, tearing up the paper and throwing it at his feet; "not as *you* understand it and never *yours!* You have debased and polluted everything connected with it, as you would have debased and polluted *me.* Out of my presence that you are insulting — out of the room of the man whose magnanimity you cannot understand!"

The destruction of the guarantee apparently stung him more than the words that accompanied it. He did not relapse again into his former shamefaced terror, but as a malignant glitter came into his eyes, he regained his coolness.

"It may not be so difficult for others to understand, Miss Nevil," he said, with polished insolence, "and as Bob Rushbrook's generosity to pretty women is already a matter of suspicion, perhaps you are wise to destroy that record of it."

"Coward!" said Grace, "stand aside and let me pass!" She swept by him to the door. But it opened upon Rushbrook's reëntrance. He stood for an instant glancing at the pair, and then on the fragments of the paper that strewed the floor. Then, still holding the door in his hand, he said quietly: —

"One moment before you go, Miss Nevil. If this is the result of any misunderstanding as to the presence of another woman here, in company with Mr. Somers, it is only fair to him to say that that woman is here as a friend of *mine*, not of his, and I alone am responsible."

Grace halted, and turned the cold steel of her proud eyes on the two men. As they rested on Rushbrook they quivered slightly. "I can already bear witness," she said coldly, "to the generosity of Mr. Rushbrook in a matter which then touched me. But there certainly is no necessity for him to show it now in a matter in which I have not the slightest concern."

As she swept out of the room and was received in the respectable shadow of the waiting James, Rushbrook turned to Somers.

"And *I 'm* afraid it won't do — for Leyton saw you," he said curtly. "Now, then, shut that door, for you and I, Jack Somers, have a word to say to each other."

What that word was, and how it was said and received, is not a part of this record. But it is told that it was the beginning of that mighty Iliad, still remembered of men, which shook the financial camps of San Francisco, and divided them into bitter contending parties. For when it became known the next day that Somers had suddenly abandoned Rushbrook, and carried over to a powerful foreign capitalist the secret methods, and even, it was believed, the *luck* of his late employer, it was certain that there would be war to the knife, and that it was no longer a struggle of rival enterprise, but of vindictive men.

CHAPTER VII

For a year the battle between the Somers faction and the giant but solitary Rushbrook raged fiercely, with varying success. I grieve to say that the protégés and parasites of Mæcenas deserted him in a body; nay, they openly alleged that it was the true artistic nature and refinement of Somers that had always attracted them, and that a man like Rushbrook, who bought pictures by the yard, — equally of the unknown struggling artist and the famous masters, — was no true patron of Art. Rushbrook made no attempt to recover his lost prestige, and once, when squeezed into a tight "corner," and forced to realize on his treasures, he put them up at auction and the people called them "daubs;" their rage knew no bounds. It was then that an unfettered press discovered that Rushbrook never was a Mæcenas at all, grimly deprecated his assumption of that title, and even doubted if he were truly a millionaire. It was at this time that a few stood by him — notably, the mill inventor from Siskyou, grown plethoric with success, but eventually ground between the upper and nether millstone of the Somers and Rushbrook party. Miss Nevil had returned to the Atlantic States with Mrs. Leyton. While rumors had played freely with the relations of Somers and the Signora as the possible cause of the rupture between him and Rushbrook, no mention had ever been made of the name of Miss Nevil.

It was raining heavily one afternoon, when Mr. Rushbrook drove from his office to his San Francisco house. The fierce struggle in which he was engaged left him little

time for hospitality, and for the last two weeks his house had been comparatively deserted. He passed through the empty rooms, changed in little except the absence of some valuable monstrosities which had gone to replenish his capital. When he reached his bedroom, he paused a moment at the open door.

"James!"

"Yes, sir," said James, appearing out of the shadow.

"What are you waiting for?"

"I thought you might be wanting something, sir."

"You were waiting there this morning; you were in the ante-room of my study while I was writing. You were outside the blue room while I sat at breakfast. You were at my elbow in the drawing-room late last night. Now, James," continued Mr. Rushbrook, with his usual grave directness, "I don't intend to commit suicide; I can't afford it, so keep your time and your rest for yourself — you want it — that 's a good fellow."

"Yes, sir."

"James!"

"Yes, sir."

Rushbrook extended his hand. There was that faint, rare smile on his handsome mouth, for which James would at any time have laid down his life. But he only silently grasped his master's hand, and the two men remained looking into each other's eyes without a word. Then Mr. Rushbrook entered his room, lay down, and went to sleep, and James vanished in the shadow.

At the end of an hour Mr. Rushbrook awoke refreshed, and even James, who came to call him, appeared to have brightened in the interval. "I have ordered a fire, sir, in the reserved room, the one fitted up from Los Osos, as your study has had no chance of being cleaned these two weeks. It will be a change for you, sir. I hope you 'll excuse my not waking you to consult you about it."

Rushbrook remained so silent that James, fancying he had not heard him, was about to repeat himself when his master said quickly, "Very well, come for me there when dinner is ready," and entered the passage leading to the room. James did not follow him, and when Mr. Rushbrook, opening the door, started back with an exclamation, no one but the inmate heard the word that rose to his lips.

For there, seated before the glow of the blazing fire, was Miss Grace Nevil. She had evidently just arrived, for her mantle was barely loosened around her neck, and upon the fringe of brown hair between her bonnet and her broad, low forehead, a few drops of rain still sparkled. As she lifted her long lashes quickly towards the door, it seemed as if they, too, had caught a little of that moisture. Rushbrook moved impatiently forward, and then stopped. Grace rose unhesitatingly to her feet, and met him halfway with frankly outstretched hands. "First of all," she said, with a half-nervous laugh, "don't scold James; it 's all my fault; I forbade him to announce me, lest you should drive me away, for I heard that during this excitement you came here for rest, and saw no one. Even the intrusion into this room is all my own. I confess now that I saw it the last night I was here; I was anxious to know if it was unchanged, and made James bring me here. I did not understand it then. I do now — and — thank you."

Her face must have shown that she was conscious that he was still holding her hand, for he suddenly released it. With a heightened color and a half-girlish *naïveté*, that was the more charming for its contrast with her tall figure and air of thoroughbred repose, she turned back to her chair, and lightly motioned him to take the one before her. "I am here on *business;* otherwise I should not have dared to look in upon you at all."

She stopped, drew off her gloves with a provoking delib-

eration, which was none the less fascinating that it implied a demûre consciousness of inducing some impatience in the breast of her companion, stretched them out carefully by the fingers, laid them down neatly on the table, placed her elbows on her knees, slightly clasped her hands together, and bending forward, lifted her honest, handsome eyes to the man before her.

"Mr. Rushbrook, I have got between four and five hundred thousand dollars that I have no use for; I can control securities which can be converted, if necessary, into a hundred thousand more in ten days. I am free and my own mistress. It is generally considered that I know what I am about; you admitted as much when I was your pupil. I have come here to place this sum in your hands, at your free disposal. You know why and for what purpose."

"But what do you know of my affairs?" asked Rushbrook quickly.

"Everything; and I know *you*, which is better. Call it an investment, if you like — for I know you will succeed — and let me share your profits. Call it — if you please — restitution, for I am the miserable cause of your rupture with that man. Or call it revenge if you like," she said with a faint smile, "and let me fight at your side against our common enemy! Please, Mr. Rushbrook, don't deny me this. I have come three thousand miles for it; I could have sent it to you — or written — but I feared you would not understand it. You are smiling — you will take it?"

"I cannot," said Rushbrook gravely.

"Then you force me to go into the Stock Market myself, and fight for you, and, unaided by your genius, perhaps lose it without benefiting you."

Rushbrook did not reply.

"At least, then, tell me why you 'cannot.'"

Rushbrook rose, and looking into her face, said quietly, with his old directness: —

"Because I love you, Miss Nevil."

A sudden instinct to rise and move away, a greater one to remain and hear him speak again, and a still greater one to keep back the blood that she felt was returning all too quickly to her cheek after the first shock, kept her silent. But she dropped her eyes.

"I loved you ever since I first saw you at Los Osos," he went on quickly; "I said to myself even then, that if there was a woman that would fill my life, and make me what she wished me to be, it was you. I even fancied that day that you understood me better than any woman, or even any man, that I had ever met before. I loved you through all that miserable business with that man, even when my failure to make you happy with another brought me no nearer to you. I have loved you always. I shall love you always. I love you more for this foolish kindness that brings you beneath my roof once more, and gives me a chance to speak my heart to you, if only once and for the last time, than all the fortune that you could put at my disposal. But I could not accept what you would offer me from any woman who was not my wife — and I could not marry any woman that did not love me. I am perhaps past the age when I could inspire a young girl's affection; but I have not reached the age when I would accept anything less." He stopped abruptly. Grace did not look up. There was a tear glistening upon her long eyelashes, albeit a faint smile played upon her lips.

"Do you call this business, Mr. Rushbrook?" she said softly.

"Business?"

"To assume a proposal declined before it has been offered."

"Grace — my darling — tell me — is it possible?"

It was too late for her to rise now, as his hands held both hers, and his handsome mouth was smiling level with

her own. So it really seemed to a dispassionate spectator that it *was* possible, and before she had left the room, it even appeared to be the most probable thing in the world.

. . . . . .

The union of Grace Nevil and Robert Rushbrook was recorded by local history as the crown to his victory over the Ring. But only he and his wife knew that it was the cause.

COLONEL STARBOTTLE'S CLIENT

CHAPTER I

It may be remembered that it was the habit of that gallant "war-horse" of the Calaveras democracy, Colonel Starbottle, at the close of a political campaign, to return to his original profession of the Law. Perhaps it could not be called a peaceful retirement. The same fiery-tongued eloquence and full-breasted chivalry which had in turns thrilled and overawed freemen at the polls were no less fervid and embattled before a jury. Yet the Colonel was counsel for two or three pastoral Ditch companies and certain bucolic corporations, and although he managed to import into the simplest question of contract more or less abuse of opposing counsel, and occasionally mingled precedents of law with antecedents of his adversary, his legal victories were seldom complicated by bloodshed. He was only once shot at by a free-handed judge, and twice assaulted by an over-sensitive litigant. Nevertheless, it was thought merely prudent, while preparing the papers in the well known case of "The Arcadian Shepherds' Association of Tuolumne *versus* the Kedron Vine and Fig-Tree Growers of Calaveras," that the Colonel should seek with a shotgun the seclusion of his partner's law office in the sylvan outskirts of Rough and Ready for that complete rest and serious preoccupation which Marysville could not afford.

It was an exceptionally hot day. The painted shingles of the plain wooden one-storied building in which the Colonel sat were warped and blistering in the direct rays of the

fierce, untempered sun. The tin sign bearing the dazzling legend, "Starbottle and Bungstarter, Attorneys and Counselors," glowed with an insufferable light; the two pine-trees still left in the clearing around the house, ineffective as shade, seemed only to have absorbed the day-long heat through every scorched and crisp twig and fibre, to radiate it again with the pungent smell of a slowly smouldering fire; the air was motionless yet vibrating in the sunlight; on distant shallows the half-dried river was flashing and intolerable.

Seated in a wooden armchair before a table covered with books and papers, yet with that apparently haughty attitude towards it affected by gentlemen of abdominal fullness, Colonel Starbottle supported himself with one hand grasping the arm of his chair and the other vigorously plying a huge palm-leaf fan. He was perspiring freely. He had taken off his characteristic blue frock-coat, waistcoat, cravat, and collar, and, stripped only to his ruffled shirt and white drill trousers, presented the appearance from the opposite side of the table of having hastily risen to work in his nightgown. A glass with a thin sediment of sugar and lemon-peel remaining in it stood near his elbow. Suddenly a black shadow fell on the staring, uncarpeted hall. It was that of a stranger who had just entered from the noiseless dust of the deserted road. The Colonel cast a rapid glance at his sword-cane, which lay on the table.

But the stranger, although sallow and morose-looking, was evidently of pacific intent. He paused on the threshold in a kind of surly embarrassment.

"I reckon this is Colonel Starbottle," he said at last, glancing gloomily round him, as if the interview was not entirely of his own seeking. "Well, I 've seen you often enough, though you don't know me. My name 's Jo Corbin. I guess," he added, still discontentedly, "I have to consult you about something."

"Corbin?" repeated the Colonel in his jauntiest manner. "Ah! Any relation to old Maje Corbin of Nashville, sir?"

"No," said the stranger briefly. "I'm from Shelbyville."

"The Major," continued the Colonel, half closing his eyes as if to follow the Major into the dreamy past, "the old Major, sir, a matter of five or six years ago, was one of my most intimate political friends, — in fact, sir, my most intimate friend. Take a chyar!"

But the stranger had already taken one, and during the Colonel's reminiscence had leaned forward, with his eyes on the ground, discontentedly swinging his soft hat between his legs. "Did you know Tom Frisbee, of Yolo?" he asked abruptly.

"Er — no."

"Nor even heard anything about Frisbee, nor what happened to him?" continued the man, with aggrieved melancholy.

In point of fact, the Colonel did not think that he had.

"Nor anything about his being killed over at Fresno?" said the stranger, with a desponding implication that the interview after all was a failure.

"If — er — if you could — er — give me a hint or two," suggested the Colonel blandly.

"There wasn't much," said the stranger, "if you don't remember." He paused, then rising, he gloomily dragged his chair slowly beside the table, and taking up a paperweight examined it with heavy dissatisfaction. "You see," he went on slowly, "I killed him — it was a quo'll. He was my pardner, but I reckon he must have drove me hard. Yes, sir," he added with aggrieved reflection, "I reckon he drove me hard."

The Colonel smiled courteously, slightly expanding his chest under the homicidal relation, as if, having taken it in

and made it a part of himself, he was ready, if necessary, to become personally responsible for it. Then lifting his empty glass to the light, he looked at it with half closed eyes, in polite imitation of his companion's examination of the paper-weight, and set it down again. A casual spectator from the window might have imagined that the two were engaged in an amicable inventory of the furniture.

"And the — er — actual circumstances?" asked the Colonel.

"Oh, it was fair enough fight. *They'll* tell you that. And so would *he*, I reckon — if he could. He was ugly and bedev'lin', but I did n't care to quo'll, and give him the go-by all the time. He kept on, followed me out of the shanty, drew, and fired twice. I" — he stopped and regarded his hat a moment as if it was a corroborating witness — "I — I closed with him — I had to — it was my only chance, and that ended it — and with his own revolver. I never drew mine."

"I see," said the Colonel, nodding, "clearly justifiable and honorable as regards the code. And you wish me to defend you?"

The stranger's gloomy expression of astonishment now turned to blank hopelessness.

"I knew you did n't understand," he said despairingly. "Why, all *that* was *two years ago*. It 's all settled and done and gone. The jury found for me at the inquest. It ain't *that* I want to see you about. It 's something arising out of it."

"Ah," said the Colonel, affably, "a vendetta, perhaps. Some friend or relation of his taken up the quarrel?"

The stranger looked abstractedly at Starbottle. "You think a relation might; or would feel in that sort of way?"

"Why, blank it all, sir," said the Colonel, "nothing is more common. Why, in '52 one of my oldest friends,

Doctor Byrne, of St. Jo, the seventh in a line from old General Byrne, of St. Louis, was killed, sir, by Pinkey Riggs, seventh in a line from Senator Riggs, of Kentucky. Original cause, sir, something about a d—d roasting ear, or a blank persimmon in 1832; forty-seven men wiped out in twenty years. Fact, sir."

"It ain't that," said the stranger, moving hesitatingly in his chair. "If it was anything of that sort I would n't mind, — it might bring matters to a wind-up, and I should n't have to come here and have this cursed talk with you."

It was so evident that this frank and unaffected expression of some obscure disgust with his own present position had no other implication, that the Colonel did not except to it. Yet the man did not go on. He stopped and seemed lost in sombre contemplation of his hat.

The Colonel leaned back in his chair, fanned himself elegantly, wiped his forehead with a large pongee handkerchief, and looking at his companion, whose shadowed abstraction seemed to render him impervious to the heat, said: —

"My dear Mr. Corbin, I perfectly understand you. Blank it all, sir, the temperature in this infernal hole is quite enough to render any confidential conversation between gentlemen upon delicate matters utterly impossible. It 's almost as near Hades, sir, as they make it, — as I trust you and I, Mr. Corbin, will ever experience. I propose," continued the Colonel, with airy genialty, "some light change and refreshment. The bar-keeper of the Magnolia is — er — I may say, sir, *facile princeps* in the concoction of mint juleps, and there is a back room where I have occasionally conferred with political leaders at election time. It is but a step, sir — in fact, on Main Street — round the corner."

The stranger looked up and then rose mechanically as the Colonel resumed his coat and waistcoat, but not his

collar and cravat, which lay limp and dejected among his papers. Then, sheltering himself beneath a large-brimmed Panama hat, and hooking his cane on his arm, he led the way, fan in hand, into the road, tiptoeing in his tight, polished boots through the red, impalpable dust with his usual jaunty manner, yet not without a profane suggestion of burning ploughshares. The stranger strode in silence by his side in the burning sun, impenetrable in his own morose shadow.

But the Magnolia was fragrant, like its namesake, with mint and herbal odors, cool with sprinkled floors, and sparkling with broken ice, on its counters, like dewdrops on white, unfolded petals — and slightly soporific with the subdued murmur of droning loungers, who were heavy with its sweets. The gallant Colonel nodded with confidential affability to the spotless-shirted bar-keeper, and then taking Corbin by the arm fraternally conducted him into a small apartment in the rear of the bar-room. It was evidently used as the office of the proprietor, and contained a plain desk, table, and chairs. At the rear window, Nature, not entirely evicted, looked in with a few straggling buckeyes and a dusty myrtle, over the body of a lately felled pine-tree, that flaunted from an upflung branch a still green spray as if it were a drooping banner lifted by a dead but rigid arm. From the adjoining room the faint, monotonous click of billiard balls, languidly played, came at intervals like the dry notes of cicale in the bushes.

The bar-keeper brought two glasses crowned with mint and diademed with broken ice. The Colonel took a long pull at his portion, and leaned back in his chair with a bland gulp of satisfaction and dreamily patient eyes. The stranger mechanically sipped the contents of his glass, and then, without having altered his reluctant expression, drew from his breast-pocket a number of old letters. Holding them displayed in his fingers like a difficult hand of cards,

and with something of the air of a dispirited player, he began: —

"You see, about six months after this yer trouble I got this letter." He picked out a well-worn, badly written missive, and put it into Colonel Starbottle's hands, rising at the same time and leaning over him as he read. "You see, she that writ it says as how she had n't heard from her son for a long time, but owing to his having spoken once about *me*, she was emboldened to write and ask me if I knew what had gone of him." He was pointing his finger at each line of the letter as he read it, or rather seemed to translate it from memory with a sad familiarity. "Now," he continued in parenthesis, "you see this kind o' got me. I knew he had got relatives in Kentucky. I knew that all this trouble had been put in the paper with his name and mine, but this here name of Martha Jeffcourt at the bottom did n't seem to jibe with it. Then I remembered that he had left a lot of letters in his trunk in the shanty, and I looked 'em over. And I found that his name *was* Tom Jeffcourt, and that he 'd been passin' under the name of Frisbee all this time."

"Perfectly natural and a frequent occurrence," interposed the Colonel cheerfully. "Only last year I met an old friend whom we 'll call Stidger, of New Orleans, at the Union Club, 'Frisco. 'How are you, Stidger?' I said; 'I have n't seen you since we used to meet — driving over the Shell Road in '53.' 'Excuse me, sir,' said he, 'my name is not Stidger, it 's Brown.' I looked him in the eye, sir, and saw him quiver. 'Then I must apologize to Stidger,' I said, 'for supposing him capable of changing his name.' He came to me an hour after, all in a tremble. 'For God's sake, Star,' he said, — always called me Star, — 'don't go back on me, but you know family affairs — another woman, beautiful creature,' etc., etc., — yes, sir, perfectly common, but a blank mistake. When a man once

funks his own name he 'll turn tail on anything. Sorry for this man, Friezecoat, or Turncoat, or whatever 's his d—d name ; but it 's so."

The suggestion did not, however, seem to raise the stranger's spirits or alter his manner. "His name was Jeffcourt, and this here was his mother," he went on drearily ; "and you see here she says" — pointing to the letter again — "she 's been expecting money from him and it don't come, and she 's mighty hard up. And that gave me an idea. I don't know," he went on, regarding the Colonel with gloomy doubt, "as you 'll think it was much ; I don't know as you would n't call it a d—d fool idea, but I got it all the same." He stopped, hesitated, and went on. "You see this man, Frisbee or Jeffcourt, was my pardner. We were good friends up to the killing, and then he drove me hard. I think I told you he drove me hard, — did n't I ? Well, he did. But the idea I got was this. Considerin' I killed him after all, and so to speak disappointed them, I reckoned I 'd take upon myself the care of that family and send 'em money every month."

The Colonel slightly straitened his clean-shaven mouth. "A kind of expiation or amercement by fine, known to the Mosaic, Roman, and old English law. Gad, sir, the Jews might have made you *marry* his widow or sister. An old custom, and I think superseded — sir, properly superseded — by the alternative of ordeal by battle in the mediæval times. I don't myself fancy these pecuniary fashions of settling wrongs, — but go on."

"I wrote her," continued Corbin, "that her son was dead, but that he and me had some interests together in a claim, and that I was very glad to know where to send her what would be his share every month. I thought it no use to tell her I killed him, — maybe she might refuse to take it. I sent her a hundred dollars every month since. Sometimes it 's been pretty hard sleddin' to do it, for I ain't

rich; sometimes I 've had to borrow the money, but I reckoned that I was only paying for my share in this here business of his bein' dead, and I did it."

"And I understand you that this Jeffcourt really had no interest in your claim?"

Corbin looked at him in dull astonishment. "Not a cent, of course; I thought I told you that. But that were n't his fault, for he never had anything, and owed me money. In fact," he added gloomily, "it was because I had n't any more to give him — havin' sold my watch for grub — that he quo'lled with me that day, and up and called me a 'sneakin' Yankee hound.' I told you he drove me hard."

The Colonel coughed slightly and resumed his jaunty manner. "And the — er — mother was, of course, grateful and satisfied?"

"Well, no, — not exactly." He stopped again and took up his letters once more, sorted and arranged them as if to play out his unfinished but hopeless hand, and drawing out another, laid it before the Colonel. "You see, this Mrs. Jeffcourt, after a time, reckoned she ought to have *more* money than I sent her, and wrote saying that she had always understood from her son (he that never wrote but once a year, remember) that this claim of ours (that she never knew of, you know) was paying much more than I sent her — and she wanted a return of accounts and papers, or she 'd write to some lawyer, mighty quick. Well, I reckoned that all this was naturally in the line of my trouble, and I *did* manage to scrape together fifty dollars more for two months and sent it. But that did n't seem to satisfy her — as you see." He dealt Colonel Starbottle another letter from his baleful hand with an unchanged face. "When I got that, — well, I just up and told her the whole thing. I sent her the account of the fight from the newspapers, and told her as how her son was the Frisbee that was my pardner, and how he never had a cent in the world — but how I 'd got

that idea to help her, and was willing to carry it out as long as I could."

"Did you keep a copy of that letter?" asked the Colonel, straitening his masklike mouth.

"No," said Corbin moodily. "What was the good? I knowed she 'd got the letter, — and she did, — for that is what she wrote back." He laid another letter before the Colonel, who hastily read a few lines and then brought his fat white hand violently on the desk.

"Why, d—n it all, sir, this is *blackmail!* As infamous a case of threatening and *chantage* as I ever heard of."

"Well," said Corbin dejectedly, "I don't know. You see, she allows that I murdered Frisbee to get hold of his claim, and that I 'm trying to buy her off, and that if I don't come down with twenty thousand dollars on the nail, and notes for the rest, she 'll prosecute me. Well, mebbe the thing looks to her like that — mebbe you know I 've got to shoulder that too. Perhaps it 's all in the same line."

Colonel Starbottle for a moment regarded Corbin critically. In spite of his chivalrous attitude towards the homicidal faculty, the Colonel was not optimistic in regard to the baser pecuniary interests of his fellow man. It was quite on the cards that his companion might have murdered his partner to get possession of the claim. It was true that Corbin had voluntarily assumed an unrecorded and hitherto unknown responsibility that had never been even suspected, and was virtually self-imposed. But that might have been the usual one unerring blunder of criminal sagacity and forethought. It was equally true that he did not look or act like a mean murderer; but that was nothing. However, there was no evidence of these reflections in the Colonel's face. Rather he suddenly beamed with an excess of politeness. "Would you — er — mind, Mr. Corbin, whilst I am going over those letters again, to — er — step across to my

office — and — er — bring me the copy of 'Wood's Digest' that lies on my table? It will save some time."

The stranger rose, as if the service was part of his self-imposed trouble, and as equally hopeless with the rest, and taking his hat departed to execute the commission. As soon as he had left the building Colonel Starbottle opened the door and mysteriously beckoned the bar-keeper within.

"Do you remember anything of the killing of a man named Frisbee over in Fresno three years ago?"

The bar-keeper whistled meditatively. "Three years ago — Frisbee? — Fresno? — no? Yes — but that was only one of his names. He was Jack Walker over here. Yes — and by Jove! that fellow that was here with you killed him. Darn my skin, but I thought I recognized him."

"Yes, yes, I know all that," said the Colonel impatiently. "But did Frisbee have any *property?* Did he have any means of his own?"

"Property?" echoed the bar-keeper with scornful incredulity. "Property? Means? The only property and means he ever had was the free lunches or drinks he took in at somebody else's expense. Why, the only chance he ever had of earning a square meal was when that fellow that was with you just now took him up and made him his partner. And the only way *he* could get rid of him was to kill him! And I did n't think he had it in him. Rather a queer kind o' chap, — good deal of hayseed about him. Showed up at the inquest so glum and orkerd that if the boys had n't made up their minds this yer Frisbee *orter been* killed — it might have gone hard with him."

"Mr. Corbin," said Colonel Starbottle, with a pained but unmistakable *hauteur* and a singular elevation of his shirt frill, as if it had become of its own accord erectile, — "Mr. Corbin — er — er — is the distant relative of old Major Corbin, of Nashville — er — one of my oldest political friends. When Mr. Corbin — er — returns, you can conduct him to me. And, if you please, replenish the glasses."

When the bar-keeper respectfully showed Mr. Corbin and "Wood's Digest" into the room again, the Colonel was still beaming and apologetic.

"A thousand thanks, sir, but except to *show* you the law if you require it — hardly necessary. I have — er — glanced over the woman's letters again; it would be better, perhaps, if you had kept copies of your own — but still these tell the whole story and *your own*. The claim is preposterous! You have simply to drop the whole thing. Stop your remittances, stop your correspondence, — pay no heed to any further letters and wait results. You need fear nothing further, sir; I stake my professional reputation on it."

The gloom of the stranger seemed only to increase as the Colonel reached his triumphant conclusion.

"I reckoned you'd say that," he said slowly, "but it won't do. I shall go on paying as far as I can. It's my trouble and I'll see it through."

"But, my dear sir, consider," gasped the Colonel. "You are in the hands of an infamous harpy, who is using her son's blood to extract money from you. You have already paid a dozen times more than the life of that d—d sneak was worth; and more than that — the longer you keep on paying you are helping to give color to their claim and estopping your own defense. And Gad, sir, you're making a precedent for this sort of thing! you are offering a premium to widows and orphans. A gentleman won't be able to exchange shots with another without making himself liable for damages. I am willing to admit that your feelings — though, in my opinion — er — exaggerated — do you credit; but I am satisfied that they are utterly misunderstood — sir."

"Not by all of them," said Corbin darkly.

"Eh?" returned the Colonel quickly.

"There was another letter here which I didn't particularly point out to you," said Corbin, taking up the letters

again, "for I reckoned it was n't evidence, so to speak, being from *his cousin*, — a girl, — and calculated you 'd read it when I was out."

The Colonel coughed hastily. "I was in fact — er — just about to glance over it when you came in."

"It was written," continued Corbin, selecting a letter more bethumbed than the others, "after the old woman had threatened me. This here young woman allows that she is sorry that her aunt has to take money of me on account of her cousin being killed, and she is still sorrier that she is so bitter against me. She says she had n't seen her cousin since he was a boy, and used to play with her, and that she finds it hard to believe that he should ever grow up to change his name and act so as to provoke anybody to lift a hand against him. She says she supposed it must be something in that dreadful California that alters people and makes everybody so reckless. I reckon her head 's level there, ain't it? "

There was such a sudden and unexpected lightening of the man's face as he said it, such a momentary relief to his persistent gloom, that the Colonel, albeit inwardly dissenting from both letter and comment, smiled condescendingly.

"She 's no slouch of a scribe neither," continued Corbin animatedly. "Read that."

He handed his companion the letter, pointing to a passage with his finger. The Colonel took it with, I fear, a somewhat lowered opinion of his client, and a new theory of the case. It was evident that this weak submission to the aunt's conspiracy was only the result of a greater weakness for the niece. Colonel Starbottle had a wholesome distrust of the sex as a business or political factor. He began to look over the letter, but was evidently slurring it with superficial politeness, when Corbin said: —

"Read it out loud."

The Colonel slightly lifted his shoulders, fortified himself with another sip of the julep, and, leaning back, oratorically began to read, — the stranger leaning over him and following line by line with shining eyes.

"'When I say I am sorry for you, it is because I think it must be dreadful for you to be going round with the blood of a fellow creature on your hands. It must be awful for you in the stillness of the night season to hear the voice of the Lord saying, "Cain, where is thy brother?" and you saying, "Lord, I have slayed him dead." It must be awful for you when the pride of your wrath was surfitted, and his dum senseless corps was before you, not to know that it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," saith the Lord. . . . It was no use for you to say, "I never heard that before," remembering your teacher and parents. Yet verily I say unto you, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be washed whiter than snow," saith the Lord — Isaiah i. 18; and "Heart hath no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal." — My hymn-book, 1st Presbyterian Church, page 79. Mr. Corbin, I pity your feelins at the grave of my pore dear cousin, knowing he is before his Maker, and you can't bring him back.' Umph! — er — er — very good — very good indeed," said the Colonel, hastily refolding the letter. "Very well meaning and — er" —

"Go on," said Corbin over his shoulder, "you have n't read all."

"Ah, true. I perceive I overlooked something. Um — um. 'May God forgive you, Mr. Corbin, as I do, and make aunty think better of you, for it was good what you tried to do for her and the fammely, and I've always said it when she was raging round and wanting money of you. I don't believe you meant to do it anyway, owin' to your kindness of heart to the ophanless and the widow since you did it. Anser this letter, and don't mind what aunty says. So no more at present from — Yours very respectfully,

SALLY DOWS.

"'P. S. — There 's been some troubel in our township, and some fitin'. May the Lord change ther hearts and make them as a little child, for if you are still young you may grow up different. I have writ a short prayer for you to say every night. You can coppy it out and put it at the head of your bed. It is this: O Lord make me sorry for having killed Sarah Dows' cousin. Give me, O Lord, that peace that the world cannot give, and which fadeth not away; for my yoke is heavy, and my burden is harder than I can bear.'"

The Colonel's deliberate voice stopped. There was a silence in the room, and the air seemed stifling. The click of the billiard balls came distinctly through the partition from the other room. Then there was another click, a stamp on the floor, and a voice crying coarsely: "Curse it all — missed again!"

To the stranger's astonishment, the Colonel was on his feet in an instant, gasping with inarticulate rage. Flinging the door open, he confronted the startled bar-keeper empurpled and stertorous.

"Blank it all, sir, do you call this a saloon for gentlemen, or a corral for swearing cattle? Or do you mean to say that the conversation of two gentlemen upon delicate professional — and — er — domestic affairs — is to be broken upon by the blank profanity of low-bred hounds over their picayune gambling! Take them my kyard, sir," choked the Colonel, who was always Southern and dialectic in his excited as in his softest moments, "and tell them that Colonel Starbottle will nevah dyarken these doahs again."

Before the astonished bar-keeper could reply, the Colonel had dashed back into the room, clapped his hat on his head, and seized his book, letters, and cane. "Mr. Corbin," he said, with gasping dignity, "I will take these papahs, and consult them again in my own office — where, if you will

do me the honor, sir, to call at ten o'clock to-morrow, I will give you my opinion." He strode out of the saloon beside the half awe-stricken, half-amused, yet all discreetly silent loungers, followed by his wondering but gloomy client. At the door they parted, — the Colonel tiptoeing towards his office as if dancing with rage, the stranger darkly plodding through the stifling dust in the opposite direction, with what might have been a faint suggestion to his counselor, that the paths of the homicide did not lie beside the still cool waters.

CHAPTER II

The house of Captain Masterton Dows, at Pineville, Kentucky, was a fine specimen of Southern classical architecture, being an exact copy of Major Fauquier's house in Virginia, which was in turn only a slight variation from a well-known statesman's historical villa in Alabama, that everybody knew was designed from a famous Greek temple on the Piræus. Not but that it shared this resemblance with the County Court House and the Odd Fellows' Hall, but the addition of training jessamine and Cherokee rose to the columns of the portico, and over the colonnade leading to its offices, showed a certain domestic distinction. And the sky line of its incongruously high roof was pleasantly broken against adjacent green pines, butternut, and darker cypress.

A nearer approach showed the stuccoed gateposts — whose red brick core was revealed through the dropping plaster — opening in a wall of half-rough stone, half-wooden palisade, equally covered with shining moss and parasitical vines, which hid a tangled garden left to its own unkempt luxuriance. Yet there was reminiscence of past formality and even pretentiousness in a wide box-bordered terrace and one or two stuccoed vases prematurely worn and time-stained; while several rare exotics had, however, thriven so unwisely and well in that stimulating soil as to lose their exclusive refinement and acquire a certain temporary vulgarity. A few, with the not uncommon enthusiasm of aliens, had adopted certain native peculiarities with a zeal that far exceeded any indigenous performance. But dominant

through all was the continual suggestion of precocious fruition and premature decay that lingered like a sad perfume in the garden, but made itself persistent if less poetical in the house.

Here the fluted wooden columns of the portico and colonnade seemed to have taken upon themselves a sodden and unwholesome age unknown to stone and mortar. Moss and creeper clung to paint that time had neither dried nor mellowed, but left still glairy in its white consistency. There were rusty red blotches around inflamed nail-holes in the swollen wood, as of punctures in living flesh; along the entablature and cornices and in the dank gutters decay had taken the form of a mild deliquescence; and the pillars were spotted as if Nature had dropped over the too early ruin a few unclean tears. The house itself was lifted upon a broad wooden foundation painted to imitate marble with such hopeless mendacity that the architect at the last moment had added a green border, and the owner permitted a fallen board to remain off so as to allow a few privileged fowls to openly explore the interior. When Miss Sally Dows played the piano in the drawing-room she was at times accompanied by the uplifted voice of the sympathetic hounds who sought its quiet retreat in ill health or low spirits, and from whom she was separated only by an imperfectly carpeted floor of yawning seams. The infant progeny of "Mammy Judy," an old nurse, made this a hiding-place from domestic justice, where they were eventually betrayed by subterranean giggling that had once or twice brought bashful confusion to the hearts of Miss Sally's admirers, and mischievous security to that finished coquette herself.

It was a pleasant September afternoon, on possibly one of these occasions, that Miss Sally, sitting before the piano, alternately striking a few notes with three pink fingers and glancing at her reflection in the polished rosewood surface of the lifted keyboard case, was heard to utter this languid protest: —

"Quit that kind of talk, Chet, unless you just admire to have every word of it repeated all over the county. Those little niggers of Mammy Judy's are lying round somewhere and are mighty 'cute, and sassy, I tell you. It 's nothin' to *me*, sure, but Miss Hilda might n't like to hear of it. So soon after your particular attention to her at last night's pawty too."

Here a fresh-looking young fellow of six-and-twenty, leaning uneasily over the piano from the opposite side, was heard to murmur that he did n't care what Miss Hilda heard, nor the whole world, for the matter of that. "But," he added, with a faint smile, "folks allow that you know how to *play up* sometimes, and put on the loud pedal, when you don't want Mammy's niggers to hear."

"Indeed," said the young lady demurely. "Like this?"

She put out a distracting little foot, clothed in the white stocking and cool black prunella slipper then *de rigueur* in the State, and, pressing it on the pedal, began to drum vigorously on the keys. In vain the amorous Chet protested in a voice which the instrument drowned. Perceiving which the artful young lady opened her blue eyes mildly and said: —

"I reckon it *is* so; it *does* kind of prevent you hearing what you don't want to hear."

"You know well enough what I mean," said the youth gloomily. "And that ain't all that folks say. They allow that you 're doin' a heap too much correspondence with that Californian rough that killed Tom Jeffcourt over there."

"Do they?" said the young lady, with a slight curl of her pretty lip. "Then perhaps they allow that if it was n't for me he would n't be sending a hundred dollars a month to Aunt Martha?"

"Yes," said the fatuous youth; "but they allow he

killed Tom for his money. And they do say it 's mighty queer doin's in yo' writin' religious letters to him, and Tom your own cousin."

"Oh, they tell those lies *here*, do they ? But do they say anything about how, when the same lies were told over in California, the lawyer they 've got over there, called Colonel Starbottle, — a Southern man, too, — got up and just wrote to Aunt Martha that she 'd better quit that afore she got prosecuted ? They did n't tell you that, did they, Mister Chester Brooks ? "

But here the unfortunate Brooks, after the fashion of all jealous lovers, deserted his allies for his fair enemy. "I don't cotton to what *they* say, Sally, but you *do* write to him, and I don't see what you 've got to write about — you and him. Jule Jeffcourt says that when you got religion at Louisville during the revival, you felt you had a call to write and save sinners, and you did that as your trial and probation, but that since you backslided and are worldly again, and go to parties, you just keep it up for foolin' and flirtin' ! *She* ain't goin' to weaken on the man that shot her brother, just because he 's got a gold mine and — a mustache ! "

"She takes his *money* all the same," said Miss Sally.

"*She* don't — her mother does. *She* says if she was a man she 'd have blood for blood ! "

"My ! " said Miss Sally in affected consternation. "It 's a wonder she don't apply to you to act for her."

"If it was *my* brother he killed, I 'd challenge him quick enough," said Chet, flushing through his thin pink skin and light hair.

"Marry her, then, and that 'll make you one of the family. I reckon Miss Hilda can bear it," rejoined the young lady pertly.

"Look here, Miss Sally," said the young fellow, with a boyish despair that was not without a certain pathos in its

implied inferiority, "I ain't gifted like you — I ain't on yo' level nohow; I can't pass yo' on the road, and so I reckon I must take yo' dust as yo' make it. But there is one thing, Miss Sally, I want to tell you. You know what 's going on in this country, — you 've heard your father say what the opinion of the best men is, and what 's likely to happen if the Yanks force that nigger worshiper, Lincoln, on the South. You know that we 're drawing the line closer every day, and spottin' the men that ain't sound. Take care, Miss Sally, you ain't sellin' us cheap to some Northern Abolitionist who 'd like to set Marm Judy's little niggers to something worse than eavesdropping down there, and mebbe teach 'em to kindle a fire underneath yo' own flo'."

He had become quite dialectic in his appeal, as if youthfully reverting to some accent of the nursery, or as if he were exhorting her in some recognized shibboleth of a section. Miss Sally rose and shut down the piano. Then leaning over it on her elbows, her rounded little chin slightly elevated with languid impertinence, and one saucy foot kicked backwards beyond the hem of her white cotton frock, she said: "And let me tell you, Mister Chester Brooks, that it 's just such God-forsaken, infant phenomenons as you who want to run the whole country that make all this fuss, when you ain't no more fit to be trusted with matches than Judy's children. What do *you* know of Mr. Jo Corbin, when you don't even know that he 's from Shelbyville, and as good a Suth'ner as you, and if he has n't got niggers it 's because they don't use them in his parts? Yo'r for all the world like one o' Mrs. Johnson's fancy bantams that ain't quit of the shell afore they square off at their own mother. My goodness! Sho! Sho-o-o!" And suiting the action to the word the young lady, still indolently, even in her simulation, swirled around, caught her skirts at the side with each hand, and lazily shaking

them before her in the accepted feminine method of frightening chickens as she retreated backwards, dropped them suddenly in a profound curtsy, and swept out of the parlor.

Nevertheless, as she entered the sitting-room she paused to listen, then, going to the window, peeped through the slits of the Venetian blind and saw her youthful admirer, more dejected in the consciousness of his wasted efforts and useless attire, mount his showy young horse, as aimlessly spirited as himself, and ride away. Miss Sally did not regret this; neither had she been entirely sincere in her defense of her mysterious correspondent. But, like many of her sex, she was trying to keep up by the active stimulus of opposition an interest that she had begun to think if left to itself might wane. She was conscious that her cousin Julia, although impertinent and illogical, was right in considering her first epistolary advances to Corbin as a youthful convert's religious zeal. But now that her girlish enthusiasm was spent, and the revival itself had proved as fleeting an excitement as the old "Tournament of Love and Beauty," which it had supplanted, she preferred to believe that she enjoyed the fascinating impropriety because it was the actual result of her religious freedom. Perhaps she had a vague idea that Corbin's conversion would expiate her present preference for dress and dancing. She had certainly never flirted with him; they had never exchanged photographs; there was not a passage in his letters that might not have been perused by her parents, — which, I fear, was probably one reason why she had never shown her correspondence; and beyond the fact that this letter-writing gave her a certain importance in her own eyes and those of her companions, it might really be stopped. She even thought of writing at once to him that her parents objected to its further continuance, but remembering that his usual monthly letter was now nearly due, she concluded to wait until it came.

It is to be feared that Miss Sally had little help in the way of family advice, and that the moral administration of the Dows household was as prematurely developed and as precociously exhausted as the estate and mansion themselves. Captain Dows' marriage with Josephine Jeffcourt, the daughter of a "poor white," had been considered a *mésalliance* by his family, and his own sister, Miranda Dows, had abandoned her brother's roof and refused to associate with the Jeffcourts, only returning to the house and an armed neutrality at the death of Mrs. Dows a few years later. She had taken charge of Miss Sally, sending her to school at Nashville until she was recalled by her father two years ago. It may be imagined that Miss Sally's correspondence with Jeffcourt's murderer had afforded her a mixed satisfaction; it was at first asserted that Miss Sally's forgiveness was really prompted by "Miss Mirandy," as a subtle sarcasm upon the family. When, however, that forgiveness seemed to become a source of revenue to the impoverished Jeffcourts, her Christian interference had declined.

For this reason, possibly, the young girl did not seek her aunt in the bedroom, the dining-room, or the business-room, where Miss Miranda frequently assisted Captain Dows in the fatuous and prejudiced mismanagement of the house and property, nor in any of the vacant guest-rooms, which, in their early wreck of latter-day mahogany and rosewood, seemed to have been unoccupied for ages, but went directly to her own room. This was in the "L," a lately added wing that had escaped the gloomy architectural tyranny of the main building, and gave Miss Sally light, ventilation, the freshness and spice of new pine boards and clean paper, and a separate entrance and windows on a cool veranda all to herself. Intended as a concession to the young lady's traveled taste, it was really a reversion to the finer simplicity of the pioneer.

New as the apartment appeared to be, it was old enough

to contain the brief little records of her maidenhood: the childish samplers and pictures; the sporting epoch with its fox-heads, opossum and wildcat skins, riding-whip, and the goshawk in a cage, which Miss Sally believed could be trained as a falcon; the religious interval of illustrated texts, "Rock of Ages," cardboard crosses, and the certificate of her membership with "The Daughters of Sion" at the head of her little bed, down to the last decadence of frivolity shown in the be-ribboned guitar in the corner, and the dance cards, favors, and rosettes, military buttons, dried bouquets, and other love gages on the mantelpiece.

The young girl opened a drawer of her table and took out a small packet of letters tied up with a green ribbon. As she did so she heard the sound of hoofs in the rear courtyard. This was presently followed by a step on the veranda, and she opened the door to her father with the letters still in her hand. There was neither the least embarrassment nor self-consciousness in her manner.

Captain Dows, superficially remarkable only for a certain odd combination of high military stock and turned-over planter's collar, was slightly exalted by a sympathetic mingling of politics and mint julep at Pineville Court House. "I was passing by the post-office at the Cross Roads last week, dear," he began cheerfully, "and I thought of you, and reckoned it was about time that my Pussy got one of her letters from her rich Californian friend — and sure enough there was one. I clean forgot to give it to you then, and only remembered it passing there to-day. I did n't get to see if there was any gold-dust in it," he continued, with great archness, and a fatherly pinch of her cheek; "though I suspect that is n't the kind of currency he sends to you."

"It *is* from Mr. Corbin," said Miss Sally, taking it with a languid kind of doubt; "and only now, paw, I was just thinking that I 'd sort of drop writing any more; it makes a good deal of buzzing amongst the neighbors, and I don't see much honey nor comb in it."

"Eh," said the Captain, apparently more astonished than delighted at his daughter's prudence. "Well, child, suit yourself! It 's mighty mean, though, for I was just thinking of telling you that Judge Read is an old friend of this Colonel Starbottle, who is your friend's friend and lawyer, and he says that Colonel Starbottle is *with us*, and working for the cause out there, and has got a list of all the So'thern men in California that are sound and solid for the South. Read says he should n't wonder if he 'd make California wheel into line too."

"I don't see what that 's got to do with Mr. Corbin," said the young girl impatiently, flicking the still unopened letter against the packet in her hand.

"Well," said the Captain, with cheerful vagueness, "I thought it might interest you, — that 's all," and lounged judicially away.

"Paw thinks," said Miss Sally, still standing in the doorway, ostentatiously addressing her pet goshawk, but with one eye following her retreating parent, — "paw thinks that everybody is as keen bent on politics as he is. There 's where paw slips up, Jim."

Reëntering the room, scratching her little nose thoughtfully with the edge of Mr. Corbin's letter, she went to the mantelpiece and picked up a small ivory-handled dagger, the gift of Joyce Masterton, aged eighteen, presented with certain verses addressed to a "Daughter of the South," and cut open the envelope. The first glance was at her own name, and then at the signature. There was no change in the formality; it was "Dear Miss Sarah," and "Yours respectfully, Jo Corbin," as usual. She was still secure. But her pretty brows contracted slightly as she read as follows: —

I've always allowed I should feel easier in my mind if I could ever get to see Mrs. Jeffcourt, and that maybe she

might feel easier in hers if I stood before her, face to face. Even if she did n't forgive me at once, it might do her good to get off what she had on her mind against me. But as there was n't any chance of her coming to me, and it was out of the question my coming to her and still keeping up enough work in the mines to send her the regular money, it could n't be done. But at last I 've got a partner to run the machine when I 'm away. I shall be at Shelbyville by the time this reaches you, where I shall stay a day or two to give you time to break the news to Mrs. Jeffcourt, and then come on. You will do this for me in your Christian kindness, Miss Dows — won't you? and if you could soften her mind so as to make it less hard for me I shall be grateful.

P. S. — I forgot to say I have had *him* exhumed — you know who I mean — and am bringing him with me in a patent metallic burial casket, — the best that could be got in 'Frisco, and will see that he is properly buried in your own graveyard. It seemed to me that it would be the best thing I could do, and might work upon her feelings — as it has on mine. Don't you?

J. C.

Miss Sally felt the tendrils of her fair hair stir with consternation. The letter had arrived a week ago; perhaps he was in Pineville at that very moment! She must go at once to the Jeffcourts, — it was only a mile distant. Perhaps she might be still in time; but even then it was a terribly short notice for such a meeting. Yet she stopped to select her newest hat from the closet, and to tie it with the largest of bows under her pretty chin; and then skipped from the veranda into a green lane that ran beside the garden boundary. There, hidden by a hedge, she dropped into a long, swinging trot, that even in her haste still kept the languid deliberation characteristic of her people, until she had reached

the road. Two or three hounds in the garden started joyously to follow her, but she drove them back with a portentous frown, and an ill-aimed stone, and a suppressed voice. Yet in that backward glance she could see that her little Eumenides — Mammy Judy's children — were peering at her from below the wooden floor of the portico, which they were grasping with outstretched arms and bowed shoulders, as if they were black caryatides supporting — as indeed their race had done for many a year — the pre-doomed and decaying mansion of their master.

CHAPTER III

HAPPILY Miss Sally thought more of her present mission than of the past errors of her people. The faster she walked the more vividly she pictured the possible complications of this meeting. She knew the dull, mean nature of her aunt, and the utter hopelessness of all appeal to anything but her selfish cupidity, and saw in this fatuous essay of Corbin only an aggravation of her worst instincts. Even the dead body of her son would not only whet her appetite for pecuniary vengeance, but give it plausibility in the eyes of their emotional but ignorant neighbors. She had still less to hope from Julia Jeffcourt's more honest and human indignation but equally bigoted and prejudiced intelligence. It is true they were only women, and she ought to have no fear of that physical revenge which Julia had spoken of, but she reflected that Miss Jeffcourt's unmistakable beauty, and what was believed to be a "truly Southern spirit," had gained her many admirers who might easily take her wrongs upon their shoulders. If her father had only given her that letter before, she might have stopped Corbin's coming at all; she might even have met him in time to hurry him and her cousin's provocative remains out of the country. In the midst of these reflections she had to pass the little hillside cemetery. It was a spot of great natural beauty, cypress-shadowed and luxuriant. It was justly celebrated in Pineville, and, but for its pretentious tombstones, might have been peaceful and suggestive. Here she recognized a figure just turning from its gate. It was Julia Jeffcourt.

Her first instinct — that she was too late and that her

cousin had come to the cemetery to make some arrangements for the impending burial — was, however, quickly dissipated by the young girl's manner.

"Well, Sally Dows, *you* here! who'd have thought of seeing you to-day? Why, Chet Brooks allowed that you danced every set last night and didn't get home till daylight. And you — you that are going to show up at another party to-night, too! Well, I reckon I haven't got that much ambition these times. And out with your new bonnet, too."

There was a slight curl of her handsome lip as she looked at her cousin. She was certainly a more beautiful girl than Miss Sally; very tall, dark and luminous of eye, with a brunette pallor of complexion, suggesting, it was said, that remote mixture of blood which was one of the unproven counts of Miss Miranda's indictment against her family. Miss Sally smiled sweetly behind her big bow. "If you reckon to tie to everything that Chet Brooks says, you'll want lots of string, and you won't be safe then. You ought to have heard him run on about this one, and that one, and that other one, not an hour ago in our parlor. I had to pack him off, saying he was even making Judy's niggers tired." She stopped and added with polite languor, "I suppose there's no news up at yo' house either? Everything's going on as usual — and — you get yo' California draft regularly?"

A good deal of the white of Julia's beautiful eyes showed as she turned indignantly on the speaker. "I wish, cousin Sally, you'd just let up talking to me about that money. You know as well as I do that I allowed to maw I would n't take a cent of it from the first! I might have had all the gowns and bonnets" — with a look at Miss Sally's bows — "I wanted from her; she even offered to take me to St. Louis for a rig-out — if I'd been willing to take blood-money. But I'd rather stick to this old sleazy mou'nin'

for Tom" — she gave a dramatic pluck at her faded black skirt — "than flaunt around in white muslins and China silks at ten dollars a yard, paid for by his murderer."

"You know black 's yo' color always, — taking in your height and complexion, Jule," said Miss Sally demurely, yet not without a feminine consciousness that it really did set off her cousin's graceful figure to perfection. "But you can't keep up this gait always. You know some day you might come upon this Mr. Corbin."

"He 'd better not cross my path," she said passionately.

"I 've heard girls talk like that about a man and then get just green and yellow after him," said Miss Sally critically. "But goodness me! speaking of meeting people reminds me I clean forgot to stop at the stage office and see about bringing over the new overseer. Lucky I met you, Jule! Good-by, dear. Come in to-night, and we 'll all go to the party together." And with a little nod she ran off before her indignant cousin could frame a suitably crushing reply to her Parthian insinuation.

But at the stage office Miss Sally only wrote a few lines on a card, put it in an envelope, which she addressed to Mr. Joseph Corbin, and then seating herself with easy carelessness on a long packing-box, languidly summoned the proprietor.

"You 're always on hand yourself at Kirby station when the kyars come in to bring passengers to Pineville, Mr. Sledge?"

"Yes, miss."

"Yo' have n't brought any strangers over lately?"

"Well, last week Squire Farnham of Green Ridge — if he kin be called a stranger — as used to live in the very house yo' father" —

"Yes, I know," said Miss Sally impatiently, "but if an *entire* stranger comes to take a seat for Pineville, you ask him if that 's his name," handing the letter, "and give it

to him if it is. And — Mr. Sledge — it 's nobody's business but — yours and mine."

"I understand, Miss Sally," with a slow, paternal, tolerating wink. "He 'll get it, and nobody else, sure."

"Thank you; I hope Mrs. Sledge is getting round again."

"Pow'fully, Miss Sally."

Having thus, as she hoped, stopped the arrival of the unhappy Corbin, Miss Sally returned home to consider the best means of finally disposing of him. She had insisted upon his stopping at Kirby and holding no communication with the Jeffcourts until he heard from her, and had strongly pointed out the hopeless infelicity of his plan. She dare not tell her Aunt Miranda, knowing that she would be too happy to precipitate an interview that would terminate disastrously to both the Jeffcourts and Corbin. She might have to take her father into her confidence, — a dreadful contingency.

She was dressed for the evening party, which was provincially early; indeed, it was scarcely past nine o'clock when she had finished her toilet, when there came a rap at her door. It was one of Mammy Judy's children.

"Dey is a gemplum, Miss Sally."

"Yes, yes," said Miss Sally impatiently, thinking only of her escort. "I 'll be there in a minute. Run away. He can wait."

"And he said I was to guv yo' dis yer," continued the little negro with portentous gravity, presenting a card.

Miss Sally took it with a smile. It was a plain card on which was written with a pencil in a hand she hurriedly recognized, "Joseph Corbin."

Miss Sally's smile became hysterically rigid, and pushing the boy aside with a little cry, she darted along the veranda and entered the parlor from a side door and vestibule. To her momentary relief she saw that her friends had not

yet arrived: a single figure — a stranger's — rose as she entered.

Even in her consternation she had time to feel the added shock of disappointment. She had always present in her mind an ideal picture of this man whom she had never seen or even heard described. Joseph Corbin had been tall, dark, with flowing hair and long mustache. He had flashing fiery eyes which were capable of being subdued by a single glance of gentleness — her own. He was tempestuous, quick, and passionate, but in quarrel would be led by a smile. He was a combination of an Italian brigand and a poker player whom she had once met on a Mississippi steamboat. He would wear a broad-brimmed soft hat, a red shirt, showing his massive throat and neck — and high boots! Alas! the man before her was of medium height, with light close-cut hair, hollow cheeks that seemed to have been lately scraped with a razor, and light gray troubled eyes. A suit of cheap black, ill fitting, hastily acquired, and provincial even for Pineville, painfully set off these imperfections, to which a white cravat in a hopelessly tied bow was superadded. A terrible idea that this combination of a country undertaker and an ill-paid circuit preacher on probation was his best holiday tribute to her, and not a funeral offering to Mr. Jeffcourt, took possession of her. And when, with feminine quickness, she saw his eyes wander over her own fine clothes and festal figure, and sink again upon the floor in a kind of hopeless disappointment equal to her own, she felt ready to cry. But the more terrible sound of laughter approaching the house from the garden recalled her. Her friends were coming.

"For Heaven's sake," she broke out desperately, "did n't you get my note at the station telling you not to come?"

His face grew darker, and then took up its look of hopeless resignation, as if this last misfortune was only an accepted part of his greater trouble, as he sat down again,

and, to Miss Sally's horror, listlessly swung his hat to and fro under his chair.

"No," he said gloomily, "I did n't go to no station. I walked here all the way from Shelbyville. I thought it might seem more like the square thing to her for me to do. I sent *him* by express ahead in the box. It 's been at the stage office all day."

With a sickening conviction that she had been sitting on her cousin's body while she wrote that ill-fated card, the young girl managed to gasp out impatiently: "But you must go — yes — go now, at once! Don't talk now, but go."

"I did n't come here," he said, rising with a kind of slow dignity, "to interfere with things I did n't kalkilate to see," glancing again at her dress, as the voices came nearer, "and that I ain't in touch with, — but to know if you think I 'd better bring him — or" —

He did not finish the sentence, for the door had opened suddenly, and a half-dozen laughing girls and their escorts burst into the room. But among them, a little haughty and still irritated from her last interview, was her cousin Julia Jeffcourt, erect and beautiful in a sombre silk.

"Go," repeated Miss Sally in an agonized whisper. "You must not be known here."

But the attention of Julia had been arrested by her cousin's agitation, and her eye fell on Corbin, where it was fixed with some fatal fascination that seemed in turn to enthrall and possess him also. To Miss Sally's infinite dismay the others fell back and allowed these two black figures to stand out, then to move towards each other with the same terrible magnetism. They were so near she could not repeat her warning to him without the others hearing it. And all hope died when Corbin, turning deliberately towards her with a grave gesture in the direction of Julia, said quietly: —

"Interduce me."

Miss Sally hesitated, and then gasped hastily, "Miss Jeffcourt."

"Yer don't say *my* name. Tell her I 'm Joseph Corbin of 'Frisco, California, who killed her brother." He stopped and turned towards her. "I came here to try and fix things again — and I 've brought *him*."

In the wondering silence that ensued the others smiled vacantly, breathlessly, and expectantly, until Corbin advanced and held out his hand, when Julia Jeffcourt, drawing hers back to her bosom with the palms outward, uttered an inarticulate cry and — and spat in his face!

With that act she found tongue — reviling him, the house that harbored him, the insolence that presented him, the insult that had been put upon her! "Are you men!" she added passionately, "who stand here with the man before you that killed my brother, and see him offer me his filthy villainous hand — and dare not strike him down!"

And they dared not. Violently, blindly, stupidly moved through all their instincts, though they gathered hysterically around him, there was something in his dull self-containment that was unassailable and awful. For he wiped his face and breast with his handkerchief without a tremor, and turned to them with even a suggestion of relief.

"She 's right, gentlemen," he said gravely. "She 's right. It might have been otherwise. I might have allowed that it might be otherwise, — but she 's right. I 'm a Soth'n man myself, gentlemen, and I reckon to understand what she has done. I killed the only man that had a right to stand up for her, and she has now to stand up for herself. But if she wants — and you see she allows she wants — to pass that on to some of you, or all of you, I 'm willing. As many as you like, and in what way you like — I waive any chyce of weapon — I 'm ready, gentlemen. I came here — with *him* — for that purpose."

Perhaps it may have been his fateful resignation; perhaps it may have been his exceeding readiness, — but there was no response. He sat down again, and again swung his hat slowly and gloomily to and fro under his chair.

"I 've got him in a box at the stage office," he went on, apparently to the carpet. "I had him dug up that I might bring him here, and mebbe bury some of the trouble and difference along with his friends. It might be," he added, with a slightly glowering upward glance, as to an overruling, but occasionally misdirecting Providence, — "it might be from the way things are piling up on me that some one might have rung in another corpse instead o' *him*, but so far as I can judge, allowin' for the space of time and nat'ral wear and tear — it 's *him!*"

He rose slowly and moved towards the door in a silence that was as much the result of some conviction that any violent demonstration against him would be as grotesque and monstrous as the situation, as of anything he had said. Even the flashing indignation of Julia Jeffcourt seemed to become suddenly as unnatural and incongruous as her brother's chief mourner himself, and although she shrank from his passing figure she uttered no word. Chester Brooks's youthful emotions, following the expression of Miss Sally's face, lost themselves in a vague hysteric smile, and the other gentlemen looked sheepish. Joseph Corbin halted at the door.

"Whatever," he said, turning to the company, "ye make up your mind to do about me, I reckon ye 'd better do it *after* the funeral. *I'm* always ready. But *he*, what with being in a box and changing climate, had better go *first*." He paused, and with a suggestion of delicacy in the momentary dropping of his eyelids, added, — "for *reasons*."

He passed out through the door, on to the portico and thence into the garden. It was noticed at the time that

the half-dozen hounds lingering there rushed after him with their usual noisy demonstrations, but that they as suddenly stopped, retreated violently to the security of the basement, and there gave relief to their feelings in a succession of prolonged howls.

CHAPTER IV

It must not be supposed that Miss Sally did not feel some contrition over the ineffective part she had played in this last episode. But Joseph Corbin had committed the unpardonable sin to a woman of destroying her own illogical ideas of him, which was worse than if he had affronted the preconceived ideas of others, in which case she might still defend him. Then, too, she was no longer religious, and had no "call" to act as peacemaker. Nevertheless she resented Julia Jeffcourt's insinuations bitterly, and the cousins quarreled — not the first time in their intercourse — and it was reserved for the latter to break the news of Corbin's arrival with the body to Mrs. Jeffcourt.

How this was done and what occurred at that interview has not been recorded. But it was known the next day that, while Mrs. Jeffcourt accepted the body at Corbin's hands, — and it is presumed the funeral expenses also, — he was positively forbidden to appear either at the services at the house or at the church. There had been some wild talk among the younger and many of the lower members of the community, notably the "poor" non-slave-holding whites, of tarring and feathering Joseph Corbin, and riding him on a rail out of the town on the day of the funeral, as a propitiatory sacrifice to the manes of Thomas Jeffcourt; but it being pointed out by the undertaker that it might involve some uncertainty in the settlement of his bill, together with some reasonable doubt of the thorough resignation of Corbin, whose previous momentary aberration in that respect they were celebrating, the project was post-

poned until *after the funeral.* And here an unlooked-for incident occurred.

There was to be a political meeting at Kirby on that day, when certain distinguished Southern leaders had gathered from the remoter Southern States. At the instigation of Captain Dows it was adjourned at the hour of the funeral to enable members to attend, and it was even rumored, to the great delight of Pineville, that a distinguished speaker or two might come over to "improve the occasion" with some slight allusion to the engrossing topic of "Southern Rights." This combined appeal to the domestic and political emotions of Pineville was irresistible. The Second Baptist Church was crowded. After the religious service there was a pause, and Judge Read, stepping forward amid a breathless silence, said that they were peculiarly honored by the unexpected presence in their midst "of that famous son of the South, Colonel Starbottle," who had lately returned to his native soil from his adopted home in California. Every eye was fixed on the distinguished stranger as he rose.

Jaunty and gallant as ever, femininely smooth-faced, yet polished and high colored as a youthful mask; pectorally expansive, and unfolding the white petals of his waistcoat through the swollen lapels of his coat, like a bursting magnolia bud, Colonel Starbottle began. The present associations were, he might say, singularly hallowed to him; not only was Pineville — a Southern centre — the recognized nursery of Southern chivalry, Southern beauty (a stately inclination to the pew in which Miss Sally and Julia Jeffcourt sat), Southern intelligence, and Southern independence, but it was the home of the lamented dead who had been, like himself and another he should refer to later, an adopted citizen of the Golden State, a seeker of the Golden Fleece, a companion of Jason. It was the home, fellow citizens and friends, of the sorrowing sister of the deceased,

a young lady whom he, the speaker, had as yet known only through the chivalrous blazon of her virtues and graces by her attendant knights (a courteous wave towards the gallery where Joyce Masterton, Chester Brooks, Calhoun Bungstarter, and the embattled youth generally of Pineville became empurpled and idiotic); it was the home of the afflicted widowed mother, also personally unknown to him, but with whom he might say he had had — er — er — professional correspondence. But it was not this alone that hallowed the occasion, it was a sentiment that should speak in trumpet-like tones throughout the South in this uprising of an united section. It was the forgetfulness of petty strife, of family feud, of personal wrongs in the claims of party! It might not be known that he, the speaker, was professionally cognizant of one of these regrettable — should he say accidents? — arising from the chivalrous challenge and equally chivalrous response of two fiery Southern spirits, to which they primarily owe their coming here that day. And he should take it as his duty, his solemn duty, in that sacred edifice to proclaim to the world that in his knowledge as a professional man — as a man of honor, as a Southerner, as a gentleman, that the — er — circumstances which three years ago led to the early demise of our lamented friend and brother, reflected only the highest credit equally on both of the parties. He said this on his own responsibility — in or out of this sacred edifice — and in or out of that sacred edifice he was personally responsible, and prepared to give the fullest satisfaction for it. He was also aware that it might not be known — or understood — that since that boyish episode the survivor had taken the place of the departed in the bereaved family and ministered to their needs with counsel and — er — er — pecuniary aid, and had followed the body afoot across the continent that it might rest with its kindred dust. He was aware that an unchristian — he would

say but for that sacred edifice — a *dastardly* attempt had been made to impugn the survivor's motives — to suggest an unseemly discord between him and the family, but he, the speaker, would never forget the letter breathing with Christian forgiveness and replete with angelic simplicity sent by a member of that family to his client, which came under his professional eye (here the professional eye for a moment lingered on the hysteric face of Miss Sally); he did not envy the head or heart of a man who could peruse these lines — of which the mere recollection — er — er — choked the utterance of even a professional man like — er — himself — without emotion. "And what, my friends and fellow citizens," suddenly continued the Colonel, replacing his white handkerchief in his coat-tail, "was the reason why *my* client, Mr. Joseph Corbin — whose delicacy keeps him from appearing among these mourners — comes here to bury all differences, all animosities, all petty passions? Because he is a son of the South; because as a son of the South, as the representative, and a distant connection, I believe, of my old political friend, Major Corbin, of Nashville, he wishes here and everywhere, at this momentous crisis, to sink everything in the one all-pervading, all-absorbing, one and indivisible *unity* of the South in its resistance to the Northern Usurper! That, my friends, is the great, the solemn, the Christian lesson of this most remarkable occasion in my professional, political, and social experience."

Whatever might have been the calmer opinion, there was no doubt that the gallant Colonel had changed the prevailing illogical emotion of Pineville by the substitution of another equally illogical, and Miss Sally was not surprised when her father, touched by the Colonel's allusion to his daughter's epistolary powers, insisted upon bringing Joseph Corbin home with him, and offering him the hospitality of the Dows mansion. Although the stranger seemed to yield

rather from the fact that the Dows were relations of the Jeffcourts than from any personal preference, when he was fairly installed in one of the appropriately gloomy guest chambers, Miss Sally set about the delayed work of reconciliation — theoretically accepted by her father, and cynically tolerated by her Aunt Miranda. But here a difficulty arose which she had not foreseen. Although Corbin had evidently forgiven her defection on that memorable evening, he had not apparently got over the revelation of her giddy worldliness, and was resignedly apathetic and distrustful of her endeavors. She was at first amused, and then angry. And her patience was exhausted when she discovered that he actually seemed more anxious to conciliate Julia Jeffcourt than her mother.

"But she spat in your face," she said indignantly.

"That 's so," he replied gloomily; "but I reckoned you said something in one of your letters about turning the other cheek when you were smitten. Of course, as you don't believe it now," he added, with his upward glance, "I suppose *that* 's been played on me, too."

But here Miss Sally's spirit lazily rebelled.

"Look here, Mr. Joseph *Jeremiah* Corbin," she returned, with languid impertinence, "if instead of cavortin' round on yo' knees trying to conciliate an old woman who never had a stroke of luck till you killed her son, and a young girl who won't be above letting on afore you think it that your conciliatin' her means *sparkin'* her; if instead of that foolishness you 'd turn your hand to trying to conciliate the folks here and keep 'em from going into that fool's act of breaking up these United States; if instead of digging up second-hand corpses that 's already been put out of sight once you 'd set to work to try and prevent the folks about here from digging up their old cranks and their old whims, and their old women fancies, you 'd be doing something like a Christian and a man! What 's yo' blood-guiltiness — I 'd

like to know — alongside of the blood-guiltiness of those fools who are just wild to rush into it, led by such turkey-cocks as yo' friend Colonel Starbottle? And you 've been five years in California — a free State — and that 's all yo' 've toted out of it — a dead body! There now, don't sit there and swing yo' hat under that chyar, but rouse out and come along with me to the pawty if you can shake a foot, and show Miss Pinkney and the gyrls yo' fit for something mo' than to skirmish round as a black japanned spittoon for Julia Jeffcourt!" It is not recorded that Corbin accepted this cheerful invitation, but for a few days afterwards he was more darkly observant of, and respectful to, Miss Sally. Strange indeed if he had not noticed — although always in his resigned fashion — the dull green stagnation of the life around him, or when not accepting it as part of his trouble he had not chafed at the arrested youth and senile childishness of the people. Stranger still if he had not at times been startled to hear the outgrown superstitions and follies of his youth voiced again by grown-up men, and perhaps strangest of all if he had not vaguely accepted it all as the hereditary curse of that barbarism under which he himself had survived and suffered.

The reconciliation between himself and Mrs. Jeffcourt was superficially effected, so far as a daily visit by him to the house indicated it to the community, but it was also known that Julia was invariably absent on these occasions. What happened at those interviews did not transpire, but it may be surmised that Mrs. Jeffcourt, perhaps recognizing the fact that Corbin was really giving her all that he had to give, or possibly having some lurking fear of Colonel Starbottle, was so far placated as to exhibit only the average ingratitude of her species towards a regular benefactor. She consented to the erection of a small obelisk over her son's grave, and permitted Corbin to plant a few flowering shrubs, which he daily visited and took care of. It is said that on

one of these pilgrimages he encountered Miss Julia, apparently on the same errand, who haughtily retired. It was further alleged, on the authority of one of Mammy Judy's little niggers, that those two black mourning figures had been seen at nightfall sitting opposite to each other at the head and foot of the grave, and "glowerin'" at one another "like two haunts." But when it was asserted on the same authority that their voices had been later overheard uplifted in some vehement discussion over the grave of the impassive dead, great curiosity was aroused. Being pressed by the eager Miss Sally to repeat some words or any words he had heard them say, the little witness glibly replied, "Marse Linkum" (Lincoln), and "The Souf," and so, for the time, shipwrecked his testimony. But it was recalled six months afterwards. It was then that a pleasant spring day brought madness and enthusiasm to a majority of Pineville, and bated breath and awe to a few, and it was known with the tidings that the South had appealed to arms, that among those who had first responded to the call was Joseph Corbin, an alleged "Union man," who had, however, volunteered to take that place in her ranks which might *have been filled by the man he had killed.* And then people forgot all about him.

. . . . . .

A year passed. It was the same place; the old familiar outlines of home and garden and landscape. But seen now, in the choking breathlessness of haste, in the fitful changing flashes of life and motion around it, in intervals of sharp suspense or dazed bewilderment, it seemed to be recognized no longer. Men who had known it all their lives hurrying to the front in compact masses, scurrying to the rear in straggling line, or opening their ranks to let artillery gallop by, stared at it vaguely, and clattered or scrambled on again. The smoke of a masked battery in the woods struggled and writhed to free itself from the

clinging tree-tops behind it, and sank back into a gray encompassing cloud. The dust thrown up by a column of passing horse poured over the wall in one long wave, and whitened the garden with its ashes. Throughout the dim empty house one no longer heard the sound of cannon, only a dull intermittent concussion was felt, silently bringing flakes of plaster from the walls, or sliding fragments of glass from the shattered windows. A shell, lifted from the ominous distance, hung uncertain in the air and then descended swiftly through the roof; the whole house dilated with flame for an instant, smoke rolled slowly from the windows, and even the desolate chimneys started into a hideous mockery of life, and then all was still again. At such awful intervals the sun shone out brightly, touched the green of the still sleeping woods and the red and white of a flower in the garden, and something in a gray uniform writhed out of the dust of the road, staggered to the wall, and died.

A mile down this road, growing more and more obscure with those rising and falling apparitions or the shapeless and rugged heaps terrible in their helpless inertia by hedge and fence, arose the cemetery hill. Taken and retaken thrice that afternoon, the dead above it far outnumbered the dead below; and when at last the tide of battle swept around its base into the dull, reverberating woods, and it emerged from the smoke, silenced and abandoned, only a few stragglers remained. One of them, leaning on his musket, was still gloomily facing the woods.

"Joseph Corbin," said a low, hurried voice.

He started and glanced quickly at the tombs around him. Perhaps it was because he had been thinking of the dead, — but the voice sounded like *his*. Yet it was only the *sister*, who had glided, pale and haggard, from the thicket.

"They are coming through the woods," she said quickly. "Run, or you 'll be taken. Why do you linger?"

"You know why," he said gloomily.

"Yes, but you have done yo' duty. You have done his work. The task is finished now, and yo' free."

He did not reply, but remained gazing at the woods.

"Joseph," she said more gently, laying her trembling hand on his arm, "Joseph, fly — and — take me with you. For I was wrong, and I want you to forgive me. I knew your heart was not in this, and I ought not to have asked you. Joseph — listen! I never wanted to avenge myself nor *him* when I spat on your face. I wanted to avenge myself on *her*. I hated her, because I thought she wanted to work upon you and use you for herself."

"Your mother," he said, looking at her.

"No," she said, with widely opened eyes; "you know who I mean — Miss Sally."

He looked at her wonderingly for a moment, but quickly bent his head again in the direction of the road. "They are coming," he said, starting. "*You* must go. This is no place for you. Stop! it's too late; you cannot go now until they have passed. Come here — crouch down here — over this grave — so."

He almost forced her — kneeling down — upon the mound below the level of the shrubs, and then ran quickly himself a few paces lower down the hill to a more exposed position. She understood it. He wished to attract attention to himself. He was successful — a few hurried shots followed from the road, but struck above him.

He clambered back quickly to where she was still crouching.

"They were the vedettes," he said, "but they have fallen back on the main skirmish line and will be here in force in a moment. Go — while you can." She had not moved. He tried to raise her — her hat fell off — he saw blood oozing from where the vedette's bullet that had missed him had pierced her brain.

THE TASK IS FINISHED

And yet he saw in that pale dead face only the other face which he remembered now had been turned like this towards his own. It was very strange. And this was the end, and this was his expiation! He raised his own face humbly, blindly, despairingly to the inscrutable sky; it looked back upon him from above as coldly as the dead face had from below.

Yet out of this he struck a faint idea that he voiced aloud in nearly the same words which he had used to Colonel Starbottle only three years ago. "It was with his own pistol too," he said, and took up his musket.

He walked deliberately down the hill, occasionally trying the stock of his musket in the loose earth, and at last suddenly remained motionless, in the attitude of leaning over it. At the same moment there was a distant shout; two thin parallel streams of blue and steel came issuing through the woods like a river, appeared to join tumultuously in the open before the hill, and out of the tumult a mounted officer called upon him to surrender.

He did not reply.

"Come down from there, Johnny Reb, I want to speak to you," called a young corporal.

He did not move.

"It's time to go home, Johnny."

No response.

The officer, who had been holding down his men with an unsworded but masterful hand, raised it suddenly. A dozen shots followed. The men leaped forward, and dashing Corbin contemptuously aside streamed up the hill past him.

But he had neither heard nor cared. For they found he had already deliberately transfixed himself through the heart on his own bayonet.

IN A PIONEER RESTAURANT

CHAPTER I

THERE was probably no earthly reason why the "Poco Más ó Menos" Club of San Francisco should have ever existed, or why its five harmless, indistinctive members should not have met and dined together as ordinary individuals. Still less was there any justification for the gratuitous opinion which obtained, that it was bold, bad, and brilliant. Looking back upon it over a quarter of a century and half a globe, I confess I cannot recall a single witticism, audacity, or humorous characteristic that belonged to it. Yet there was no doubt that we were thought to be extremely critical and satirical, and I am inclined to think we honestly believed it. To take our seats on Wednesdays and Saturdays at a specially reserved table at the restaurant we patronized, to be conscious of being observed by the other guests, and of our waiter confidentially imparting our fame to strangers behind the shaken-out folds of a napkin, and of knowing that the faintest indication of merriment from our table thrilled the other guests with anticipatory smiles, was, I am firmly convinced, all that we ever did to justify our reputations. Nor, strictly speaking, were we remarkable as individuals: an assistant editor, a lawyer, a young army quartermaster, a bank clerk, and a mining secretary — we could not separately challenge any special social or literary distinction. Yet I am satisfied that the very name of our Club — a common Spanish colloquialism, literally meaning "a little more or less," and adopted in Californian slang to

express an unknown quantity — was supposed to be replete with deep and convulsing humor.

My impression is that our extravagant reputation, and, indeed, our continued existence as a Club, was due solely to the proprietor of the restaurant and two of his waiters, and that we were actually "run" by them. When the suggestion of our meeting regularly there was first broached to the proprietor — a German of slow but deep emotions — he received it with a "So" of such impressive satisfaction that it might have been the beginning of our vainglory. From that moment he became at once our patron and our devoted slave. To linger near our table once or twice during dinner with an air of respectful vacuity, — as of one who knew himself too well to be guilty of the presumption of attempting to understand our brilliancy, — to wear a certain parental pride and unconsciousness in our fame, and yet to never go further in seeming to comprehend it than to obligingly translate the name of the Club as "a leedle more and nod quide so much," — was to him sufficient happiness. That he ever experienced any business profit from the custom of the Club, or its advertisement, may be greatly doubted; on the contrary, that a few plain customers, nettled at our self-satisfaction, might have resented his favoritism seemed more probable. Equally vague, disinterested, and loyal was the attachment of the two waiters, — one an Italian, faintly reminiscent of better days and possibly superior extraction; the other a rough but kindly Western man, who might have taken this menial position from temporary stress of circumstances, yet who continued in it from sheer dominance of habit and some feebleness of will. They both vied with each other to please us. It may have been they considered their attendance upon a reputed intellectual company less degrading than ministering to the purely animal and silent wants of the average customers. It may have been that they were attracted by our general youthfulness. Indeed,

I am inclined to think that they themselves were much more distinctive and interesting than any members of the Club, and it is to introduce *them* that I venture to recall so much of its history.

A few months after our advent at the restaurant, one evening, Joe Tallant, the mining secretary, one of our liveliest members, was observed to be awkward and distrait during dinner, forgetting even to offer the usual gratuity to the Italian waiter who handed him his hat, although he stared at him with an imbecile smile. As we chanced to leave the restaurant together, I was rallying him upon his abstraction, when to my surprise he said gravely: "Look here, one of two things has got to happen: either we must change our restaurant or I 'm going to resign."

"Why?"

"Well, to make matters clear, I 'm obliged to tell you something that in our business we usually keep a secret. About three weeks ago I had a notice to transfer twenty feet of Gold Hill to a fellow named 'Tournelli.' Well, Tournelli happened to call for it himself, and who the devil do you suppose Tournelli was? Why, our Italian waiter. I was regularly startled, and so was he. But business is business; so I passed him over the stock and said nothing — nor did he — neither there nor here. Day before yesterday he had thirty feet more transferred to him, and sold out."

"Well?" I said impatiently.

"Well," repeated Tallant indignantly, "Gold Hill 's worth six hundred dollars a foot. That 's eighteen thousand dollars cash. And a man who 's good enough for that much money is too good to wait upon me. Fancy a man who could pay my whole year's salary with five feet of stock slinging hash to *me*. Fancy *you* tipping him with a quarter!"

"But if *he* don't mind it — and prefers to continue a

waiter — why should *you* care ? And *we* 're not supposed to know."

" That 's just it," groaned Tallant. " That 's just where the sell comes in. Think how he must chuckle over us ! No, sir ! There 's nothing aristocratic about me ; but, by thunder, if I can't eat my dinner, and feel I am as good as the man who waits on me, I 'll resign from the Club."

After endeavoring to point out to him the folly of such a proceeding, I finally suggested that we should take the other members of our Club into our confidence, and abide by their decision ; to which he agreed. But, to his chagrin, the others, far from participating in his delicacy, seemed to enjoy Tournelli's unexpected wealth with a vicarious satisfaction and increase of dignity as if we were personally responsible for it. Although it had been unanimously agreed that we should make no allusions, jocose or serious, to him, nor betray any knowledge of it before him, I am afraid our attitude at the next dinner was singularly artificial. A nervous expectancy when he approached us, and a certain restraint during his presence, a disposition to check any discussion of shares or " strikes " in mining lest he should think it personal, an avoidance of unnecessary or trifling " orders," and a singular patience in awaiting their execution when given ; a vague hovering between sympathetic respect and the other extreme of indifferent bluntness in our requests, tended, I think, to make that meal far from exhilarating. Indeed, the unusual depression affected the unfortunate cause of it, who added to our confusion by increased solicitude of service and — as if fearful of some fault, or having incurred our disfavor — by a deprecatory and exaggerated humility that in our sensitive state seemed like the keenest irony. At last, evidently interpreting our constraint before him into a desire to be alone, he retired to the door of a distant pantry, whence he surveyed us with dark and sorrowful Southern eyes. Tallant, who in this

general embarrassment had been imperfectly served, and had eaten nothing, here felt his grievance reach its climax, and in a sudden outbreak of recklessness he roared out, "Hi waiter — you, Tournelli. He may," he added, turning darkly to us, "buy up enough stock to control the board and dismiss *me;* but, by thunder, if it costs me my place, I 'm going to have some more chicken!"

It was probably this sensitiveness that kept us from questioning him, even indirectly, and perhaps led us into the wildest surmises. He was acting secretly for a brotherhood or society of waiters; he was a silent partner of his German employer; he was a disguised Italian stockbroker, gaining "points" from the unguarded conversation of "operating" customers; he was a political refugee with capital; he was a fugitive Sicilian bandit, investing his ill-gotten gains in California; he was a dissipated young nobleman, following some amorous intrigue across the ocean, and acting as his own Figaro or Leporello. I think a majority of us favored the latter hypothesis, possibly because we were young, and his appearance gave it color. His thin black mustaches and dark eyes, we felt, were Tuscan and aristocratic; at least, they were like the baritone who played those parts, and *he* ought to know. Yet nothing could be more exemplary and fastidious than his conduct towards the few lady frequenters of the "Poodle Dog" restaurant, who, I regret to say, were not puritanically reserved or conventual in manner.

But an unexpected circumstance presently changed and divided our interest. It was alleged by Clay, the assistant editor, that entering the restaurant one evening he saw the back and tails of a coat that seemed familiar to him half filling a doorway leading to the restaurant kitchen. It was unmistakably the figure of one of our Club members, — the young lawyer, — Jack Manners. But what was he doing there? While the Editor was still gazing after him, he

suddenly disappeared, as if some one had warned him that he was observed. As he did not reappear, when Tournelli entered from the kitchen a few moments later, the Editor called him and asked for his fellow member. To his surprise the Italian answered, with every appearance of truthfulness, that he had not seen Mr. Manners at all! The Editor was staggered; but as he chanced, some hours later, to meet Manners, he playfully rallied him on his mysterious conference with the Italian. Manners replied briefly that he had had no interview whatever with Tournelli, and changed the subject quickly. The mystery — as we persisted in believing it — was heightened when another member deposed that he had seen "Tom," the Western waiter, coming from Manners's office. As Manners had volunteered no information of this, we felt that we could not without indelicacy ask him if Tom was a client, or a messenger from Tournelli. The only result was that our Club dinner was even more constrained than before. Not only was "Tom" now invested with a dark importance, but it was evident that the harmony of the Club was destroyed by these singular secret relations of two of its members with their employees.

It chanced that one morning, arriving from a delayed journey, I dropped into the restaurant. It was that slack hour between the lingering breakfast and coming luncheon when the tables are partly stripped and unknown doors, opened for ventilation, reveal the distant kitchen, and a mingled flavor of cold coffee-grounds and lukewarm soups hangs heavy on the air. To this cheerlessness was added a gusty rain without, that filmed the panes of the windows and doors, and veiled from the passer-by the usual tempting display of snowy cloths and china.

As I seemed to be the only customer at that hour, I selected a table by the window for distraction. Tom had taken my order; the other waiters, including Tournelli,

were absent, with the exception of a solitary German, who, in the interlude of perfunctory trifling with the casters, gazed at me with that abstracted irresponsibility which one waiter assumes towards another's customer. Even the proprietor had deserted his desk at the counter. It seemed to be a favorable opportunity to get some information from Tom.

But he anticipated me. When he had dealt a certain number of dishes around me, as if they were cards and he was telling my fortune, he leaned over the table and said, with interrogating confidence: —

"I reckon you call that Mr. Manners of yours a good lawyer?"

We were very loyal to each other in the Club, and I replied with youthful enthusiasm that he was considered one of the most promising at the bar. And, remembering Tournelli, I added confidently that whoever engaged him to look after their property interests had secured a treasure.

"But is he good in criminal cases — before a police court, for instance?" continued Tom.

I believed — I don't know on what grounds — that Manners was good in insurance and admiralty law, and that he looked upon criminal practice as low; but I answered briskly — though a trifle startled — that as a criminal lawyer he was perfect.

"He could advise a man, who had a row hanging on, how to steer clear of being up for murder — eh?"

I trusted, with a desperate attempt at jocosity, that neither he nor Tournelli had been doing anything to require Manners's services in that way.

"It would be too late, *then*," said Tom coolly, "and *anybody* could tell a man what he ought to have done, or how to make the best of what he had done; but the smart thing in a lawyer would be to give a chap points *beforehand*, and sorter tell him how far he could go, and yet keep inside

the law. How he might goad a fellow to draw on him, and then plug him — eh ? "

I looked up quickly. There was nothing in his ordinary, good-humored, but not very strong face to suggest that he himself was the subject of this hypothetical case. If he were speaking for Tournelli, the Italian certainly was not to be congratulated on his ambassador's prudence ; and, above all, Manners was to be warned of the interpretation which might be put upon his counsels, and disseminated thus publicly. As I was thinking what to say, he moved away, but suddenly returned again.

" What made you think Tournelli had been up to anything ? " he asked sharply.

" Nothing," I answered ; " I only thought you and he, being friends " —

" You mean we 're both waiters in the same restaurant. Well, I don't know him any better than I know that chap over there," pointing to the other waiter. " He 's a Greaser or an Italian, and, I reckon, goes with his kind."

Why had we not thought of this before ? Nothing would be more natural than that the rich and imperious Tournelli should be exclusive, and have no confidences with his enforced associates. And it was evident that Tom had noticed it and was jealous.

" I suppose he 's rather a swell, is n't he ? " I suggested tentatively.

A faint smile passed over Tom's face. It was partly cynical and partly suggestive of that amused toleration of our youthful credulity which seemed to be a part of that discomposing patronage that everybody extended to the Club. As he said nothing, I continued encouragingly : —

" Because a man 's a waiter, it does n't follow that he 's always been one, or always will be."

" No," said Tom abstractedly ; " but it 's about as good as anything else to lie low and wait on." But here two

customers entered, and he turned to them, leaving me in doubt whether to accept this as a verbal pleasantry or an admission. Only one thing seemed plain : I had certainly gained no information, and only added a darker mystery to his conference with Manners, which I determined I should ask Manners to explain.

I finished my meal in solitude. The rain was still beating drearily against the windows with an occasional accession of impulse that seemed like human impatience. Vague figures under dripping umbrellas, that hid their faces as if in premeditated disguise, hurried from the main thoroughfare. A woman in a hooded waterproof like a domino, a Mexican in a black serape, might have been stage conspirators hastening to a rendezvous. The cavernous chill and odor which I had before noted as coming from some sarcophagus of larder or oven, where "funeral baked meats" might have been kept in stock, began to oppress me. The hollow and fictitious domesticity of this common board had never before seemed so hopelessly displayed. And Tom, the waiter, his napkin twisted in his hand and his face turned with a sudden dark abstraction towards the window, appeared to be really "lying low," and waiting for something outside his avocation.

CHAPTER II

The fact that Tom did not happen to be on duty at the next Club dinner gave me an opportunity to repeat his mysterious remark to Manners, and to jokingly warn that rising young lawyer against the indiscretion of vague counsel. Manners, however, only shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know what he meant," he said carelessly; "but since *he* chooses to talk of his own affairs publicly, *I* don't mind saying that they are neither very weighty nor very dangerous. It 's only the old story: the usual matrimonial infidelities that are mixed up with the Californian emigration. He leaves the regular wife behind, — fairly or unfairly, I can't say. She gets tired waiting, after the usual style, and elopes with somebody else. The Western Penelope is n't built for waiting. But she seems to have converted some of his property into cash when she skipped from St. Louis, and that 's where his chief concern comes in. That 's what he wanted to see me for; that 's why he inveigled me into that infernal pantry of his one day to show me a plan of his property, as if that was any good."

He paused disgustedly. We all felt, I think, that Tom was some kind of an impostor, claiming the sympathies of the Club on false pretenses. Nevertheless, the Quartermaster said, "Then you did n't do anything for him — give him any advice, eh?"

"No; for the property 's as much hers as his, and he has n't got a divorce; and, as it 's doubtful whether he did n't desert her first, he can't get one. He was surprised," he added, with a grim smile, "when I told him that he was

obliged to support her, and was even liable for her debts. But people who are always talking of invoking the law know nothing about it." We were surprised too, although Manners was always convincing us, in some cheerful but discomposing way, that we were all daily and hourly, in our simplest acts, making ourselves responsible for all sorts of liabilities and actions, and even generally preparing ourselves for arrest and imprisonment. The Quartermaster continued lazily: —

"Then you did n't give him any points about shooting?"

"No; he does n't even know the man she went off with. It was eighteen months ago, and I don't believe he 'd even know her again if he met her. But, if he is n't much of a client, we shall miss him to-night as a waiter, for the place is getting full, and there are not enough to serve."

The restaurant was, indeed, unusually crowded that evening; the more so that, the private rooms above being early occupied, some dinner-parties and exclusive couples had been obliged to content themselves with the public dining saloon. A small table nearest us, usually left vacant to insure a certain seclusion to the Club, was arranged, with a deprecatory apology from the proprietor, for one of those couples, a man and woman. The man was a well-known speculator, — cool, yet reckless and pleasure-loving; the woman, good-looking, picturesquely attractive, self-conscious, and self-possessed. Our propinquity was evidently neither novel nor discomposing. As she settled her skirts in her place, her bright, dark eyes swept our table with a frank, almost childish, familiarity. The younger members of the Club quite unconsciously pulled up their collars and settled their neckties; the elders as unconsciously raised their voices slightly, and somewhat arranged their sentences. Alas! the simplicity and unaffectedness of the Club were again invaded.

Suddenly there was a crash, the breaking of glass, and an exclamation. Tournelli, no doubt disorganized by the

unusual hurry, on his way to our table had dropped his tray, impartially distributed a plate of asparagus over an adjoining table, and, flushed and nervous, yet with an affectation of studied calmness, was pouring the sauce into the young Quartermaster's plate, in spite of his languid protests. At any other time we would have laughed, but there was something in the exaggerated agitation of the Italian that checked our mirth. Why should he be so upset by a trifling accident? He could afford to pay for the breakage; he would laugh at dismissal. Was it the sensitiveness of a refined nature, or — he was young and good-looking — was he disconcerted by the fact that our handsome neighbor had witnessed his awkwardness? But she was not laughing, and, as far as I could see, was intently regarding the bill of fare.

"Waiter!" called her companion, hailing Tournelli. "Here!" The Italian, with a face now distinctly white, leaned over the table, adjusting the glasses, but did not reply.

"Waiter!" repeated the stranger sharply. Tournelli's face twitched, then became set as a mask; but he did not move. The stranger leaned forward and pulled his apron from behind. Tournelli started with flashing eyes, and turned swiftly round. But the Quartermaster's hand had closed on his wrist.

"That 's my knife, Tournelli."

The knife dropped from the Italian's fingers.

"Better see *what* he wants. It may not be *that*," said the young officer, coolly but kindly.

Tournelli turned impatiently towards the stranger. We alone had witnessed this incident, and were watching him breathlessly. Yet what bade fair a moment ago to be a tragedy, seemed now to halt grotesquely. For Tournelli, throwing open his linen jacket with a melodramatic gesture, tapped his breast, and with flashing eyes and suppressed accents said, "Sare; you wantah me? Look — I am herre!"

The speculator leaned back in his chair in good-humored astonishment. The lady's black eyes, without looking at Tournelli, glanced backward round the room, and slipped along our table with half-defiant unconcern; and then she uttered a short hysterical laugh.

"Ah! ze lady — madame — ze signora — eh — she wantah me?" continued Tournelli, leaning on the table with compressed fingers, and glaring at her. "Perhaps *she* wantah Tournelli — eh?"

"Well, you might bring some with the soup," blandly replied her escort, who seemed to enjoy the Italian's excitement as a national eccentricity; "but hurry up and set the table, will you?"

Then followed, on the authority of the Editor, who understood Italian, a singular scene. Secure, apparently, in his belief that his language was generally uncomprehended, Tournelli brought a decanter, and, setting it on the table, said, "Traitress!" in an intense whisper. This was followed by the cruets, which he put down with the exclamation, "Perjured fiend!" Two glasses, placed on either side of her, carried the word "Apostate!" to her ear; and three knives and forks, rattling more than was necessary, and laid crosswise before her plate, were accompanied with "Tremble, wanton!" Then, as he pulled the tablecloth straight, and ostentatiously concealed a wine-stain with a clean napkin, scarcely whiter than his lips, he articulated under his breath: "Let him beware! he goes not hence alive! I will slice his craven heart — thus — and thou shalt see it." He turned quickly to a side table and brought back a spoon. "And *this* is why I have not found you;" another spoon, "For *this* you have disappeared;" a purely perfunctory polishing of her fork, "For *him*, bah!" an equally unnecessary wiping of her glass, "Blood of God!" — more wiping — "It will end! Yes" — general wiping and a final flourish over the whole table

with a napkin — "I go, but at the door I shall await you both."

She had not spoken yet, nor even lifted her eyes. When she did so, however, she raised them level with his, showed all her white teeth — they were small and cruel-looking — and said smilingly in his own dialect: —

"Thief!"

Tournelli halted, rigid.

"You 're talking his lingo, eh?" said her escort good humoredly.

"Yes."

"Well — tell him to bustle around and be a little livelier with the dinner, won't you? This is only skirmishing."

"You hear," she continued to Tournelli in a perfectly even voice; "or shall it be a policeman, and a charge of stealing?"

"Stealing!" gasped Tournelli. "*You* say stealing!"

"Yes — ten thousand dollars. You are well disguised here, my little fellow; it is a good business — yours. Keep it while you can."

I think he would have sprung upon her there and then, but that the Quartermaster, who was nearest him, and had been intently watching his face, made a scarcely perceptible movement as if ready to anticipate him. He caught the officer's eye; caught, I think, in ours the revelation that he had been understood, drew back with a sidelong, sinuous movement, and disappeared in the passage to the kitchen.

I believe we all breathed more freely, although the situation was still full enough of impending possibilities to prevent peaceful enjoyment of our dinner. As the Editor finished his hurried translation, it was suggested that we ought to warn the unsuspecting escort of Tournelli's threats. But it was pointed out that this would be betray-

ing the woman, and that Jo Hays (her companion) was fully able to take care of himself. "Besides," said the Editor aggrievedly, "you fellows only think of *yourselves*, and you don't understand the first principles of journalism. Do you suppose I 'm going to do anything to spoil a half column of leaded brevier copy — from an eye-witness, too? No; it's a square enough fight as it stands. We must look out for the woman, and not let Tournelli get an unfair drop on Hays. That is, if the whole thing is n't a bluff."

But the Italian did not return. Whether he had incontinently fled, or was nursing his wrath in the kitchen, or already fulfilling his threat of waiting on the pavement outside the restaurant, we could not guess. Another waiter appeared with the dinners they had ordered. A momentary thrill of excitement passed over us at the possibility that Tournelli had poisoned their soup; but it presently lapsed, as we saw the couple partaking of it comfortably, and chatting with apparent unconcern. Was the scene we had just witnessed only a piece of Southern exaggeration? Was the woman a creature devoid of nerves or feeling of any kind; or was she simply a consummate actress? Yet she was clearly not acting, for in the intervals of conversation, and even while talking, her dark eyes wandered carelessly around the room, with the easy self-confidence of a pretty woman. We were beginning to talk of something else, when the Editor said suddenly, in a suppressed voice: —

"Hullo! What 's the matter now?"

The woman had risen, and was hurriedly throwing her cloak over her shoulders. But it was *her* face that was now ashen and agitated, and we could see that her hands were trembling. Her escort was assisting her, but was evidently as astonished as ourselves. "Perhaps," he suggested hopefully, "if you wait a minute it will pass off."

"No, no," she gasped, still hurriedly wrestling with her

cloak. "Don't you see I'm suffocating here — I want air. You can follow!" She began to move off, her face turned fixedly in the direction of the door. We instinctively looked there — perhaps for Tournelli. There was no one. Nevertheless, the Editor and Quartermaster had half risen from their seats.

"Helloo!" said Manners suddenly. "There's Tom just come in. Call him!"

Tom, evidently recalled from his brief furlough by the proprietor on account of the press of custom, had just made his appearance from the kitchen.

"Tom, where's Tournelli?" asked the Lawyer hurriedly, but following the retreating woman with his eyes.

"Skipped, they say. Somebody insulted him," said Tom curtly.

"You did n't see him hanging round outside, eh? Swearing vengeance?" asked the Editor.

"No," said Tom scornfully.

The woman had reached the door, and darted out of it as her escort paused a moment at the counter to throw down a coin. Yet in that moment she had hurried before him through the passage into the street. I turned breathlessly to the window. For an instant her face, white as a phantom's, appeared pressed rigidly against the heavy plate-glass, her eyes staring with a horrible fascination back into the room — I even imagined at us. Perhaps, as it was evident that Tournelli was not with her, she fancied he was still here; perhaps she had mistaken Tom for him! However, her escort quickly rejoined her; their shadows passed the window together — they were gone.

Then a pistol-shot broke the quiet of the street.

The Editor and Quartermaster rose and ran to the door. Manners rose also, but lingered long enough to whisper to me, "Don't lose sight of Tom," and followed them. But to my momentary surprise no one else moved. I had for-

gotten, in the previous excitement, that in those days a pistol-shot was not unusual enough to attract attention. A few raised their heads at the sound of running feet on the pavement, and the flitting of black shadows past the windows. Tom had not stirred, but, napkin in hand, and eyes fixed on vacancy, was standing, as I had seen him once before, in an attitude of listless expectation.

In a few minutes Manners returned. I thought he glanced oddly at Tom, who was still lingering in attendance, and I even fancied he talked to us ostentatiously for his benefit. Yes, it was a row of Tournelli's. He was waiting at the corner; had rushed at Hays with a knife, but had been met with a derringer-shot through his hat. The lady, who, it seems, was only a chance steamer acquaintance of Hays's, thought the attack must have been meant for *her*, as she had recognized in the Italian a man who had stolen from her divorced husband in the States, two years ago, and was a fugitive from justice. At least that was the explanation given by Hays, for the woman had fainted and been driven off to her hotel by the Quartermaster, and Tournelli had escaped. But the Editor was on his track. "You did n't notice that lady, Tom, did you?"

Tom came out of an abstracted study, and said, "No, she had her back to me all the time."

Manners regarded him steadily for a moment without speaking, but in a way that I could not help thinking was much more embarrassing to the bystanders than to him. When we rose to leave, as he placed his usual gratuity into Tom's hand, he said carelessly, "You might drop into my office to-morrow if you have anything to tell *me*."

"I have n't," said Tom quietly.

"Then I may have something to tell *you*."

Tom nodded, and turned away to his duties.

The Mining Secretary and myself could scarcely wait to reach the street before we turned eagerly on Manners.

"Well?"

"Well; the woman you saw was Tom's runaway wife, and Tournelli the man she ran away with."

"And Tom knew it?"

"Can't say."

"And you mean to say that all this while Tom never suspected *him*, and even did not recognize *her* just now?"

Manners lifted his hat and passed his fingers through his hair meditatively. "Ask me something easier, gentlemen."

JOHNSON'S "OLD WOMAN"

It was growing dark, and the Sonora trail was becoming more indistinct before me at every step. The difficulty had increased over the grassy slope, where the overflow from some smaller watercourse above had worn a number of diverging gullies so like the trail as to be undistinguishable from it. Unable to determine which was the right one, I threw the reins over the mule's neck and resolved to trust to that superior animal's sagacity, of which I had heard so much. But I had not taken into account the equally well-known weaknesses of sex and species, and Chu Chu had already shown uncontrollable signs of wanting her own way. Without a moment's hesitation, feeling the relaxed bridle, she lay down and rolled over.

In this perplexity the sound of horse's hoofs ringing out of the rocky cañon beyond was a relief, even if momentarily embarrassing. An instant afterwards a horse and rider appeared cantering round the hill on what was evidently the lost trail, and pulled up as I succeeded in forcing Chu Chu to her legs again.

"Is that the trail from Sonora?" I asked.

"Yes;" but with a critical glance at the mule, "I reckon you ain't going thar to-night."

"Why not?"

"It's a matter of eighteen miles, and most of it a blind trail through the woods after you take the valley."

"Is it worse than this?"

"What 's the matter with this trail? Ye ain't expecting a racecourse or a shell road over the foothills — are ye?"

"No. Is there any hotel where I can stop?"

"Nary."

"Nor any house?"

"No."

"Thank you. Good-night."

He had already passed on, when he halted again and turned in his saddle. "Look yer. Just a spell over yon cañon ye 'll find a patch o' buckeyes; turn to the right and ye 'll see a trail. That 'll take ye to a shanty. You ask if it 's Johnson's."

"Who 's Johnson?"

"I am. You ain't lookin' for Vanderbilt or God Almighty up here, are you? Well, then, you hark to me, will you? You say to my old woman to give you supper and a shakedown somewhar to-night. Say *I* sent you. So long."

He was gone before I could accept or decline. An extraordinary noise proceeded from Chu Chu, not unlike a suppressed chuckle. I looked sharply at her; she coughed affectedly, and, with her head and neck stretched to their greatest length, appeared to contemplate her neat little off fore shoe with admiring abstraction. But as soon as I had mounted she set off abruptly, crossed the rocky cañon, apparently sighted the patch of buckeyes of her own volition, and without the slightest hesitation found the trail to the right, and in half an hour stood before the shanty.

It was a log cabin with an additional "lean-to" of the same material, roofed with bark, and on the other side a larger and more ambitious "extension" built of rough, unplaned, and unpainted redwood boards, lightly shingled. The "lean-to" was evidently used as a kitchen, and the central cabin as a living-room. The barking of a dog as I approached called four children of different sizes to the open door, where already an enterprising baby was feebly essaying to crawl over a bar of wood laid across the threshold to restrain it.

"Is this Johnson's house?"

My remark was really addressed to the eldest, a boy of apparently nine or ten, but I felt that my attention was unduly fascinated by the baby, who at that moment had toppled over the bar, and was calmly eying me upside down, while silently and heroically suffocating in its petticoats. The boy disappeared without replying, but presently returned with a taller girl of fourteen or fifteen. I was struck with the way that, as she reached the door, she passed her hands rapidly over the heads of the others as if counting them, picked up the baby, reversed it, shook out its clothes, and returned it to the inside, without even looking at it. The act was evidently automatic and habitual.

I repeated my question timidly.

Yes, it *was* Johnson's, but he had just gone to King's Mills. I replied, hurriedly, that I knew it, — that I had met him beyond the cañon. As I had lost my way and could n't get to Sonora to-night, he had been good enough to say that I might stay there until morning. My voice was slightly raised for the benefit of Mr. Johnson's "old woman," who, I had no doubt, was inspecting me furtively from some corner.

The girl drew the children away, except the boy. To him she said simply, "Show the stranger whar to stake out his mule, 'Dolphus," and disappeared in the "extension" without another word. I followed my little guide, who was perhaps more actively curious, but equally unresponsive. To my various questions he simply returned a smile of exasperating vacuity. But he never took his eager eyes from me, and I was satisfied that not a detail of my appearance escaped him. Leading the way behind the house to a little wood, whose only "clearing" had been effected by decay or storm, he stood silently apart while I picketed Chu Chu. neither offering to assist me, nor opposing any interruption

to my survey of the locality. There was no trace of human cultivation in the surroundings of the cabin; the wilderness still trod sharply on the heels of the pioneer's fresh foot-prints, and even seemed to obliterate them. For a few yards around the actual dwelling there was an unsavory fringe of civilization in the shape of cast-off clothes, empty bottles, and tin cans, and the adjacent thorn and elder bushes blossomed unwholesomely with bits of torn white paper and bleaching dish-cloths. This hideous circle never widened; Nature always appeared to roll back the intruding débris; no bird nor beast carried it away; no animal ever forced the uncleanly barrier; civilization remained grimly trenched in its own exuvia. The old terrifying girdle of fire around the hunter's camp was not more deterring to curious night prowlers than this coarse and accidental out-work.

When I regained the cabin I found it empty, the doors of the lean-to and extension closed, but there was a stool set before a rude table, upon which smoked a tin cup of coffee, a tin dish of hot saleratus biscuit, and a plate of fried beef. There was something odd and depressing in this silent exclusion of my presence. Had Johnson's "old woman" from some dark post of observation taken a dislike to my appearance, or was this churlish withdrawal a peculiarity of Sierran hospitality? Or was Mrs. Johnson young and pretty, and hidden under the restricting ban of Johnson's jealousy, or was she a deformed cripple, or even a bedridden crone? From the extension at times came a murmur of voices, but never the accents of adult womanhood. The gathering darkness, relieved only by a dull glow from the smouldering logs in the adobe chimney, added to my loneliness. In the circumstances I knew I ought to have put aside the repast and given myself up to gloomy and pessimistic reflection; but Nature is often inconsistent, and in that keen mountain air, I grieve to say, my physical and moral condition was

not in that perfect accord always indicated by romancers. I had an appetite and I gratified it; dyspepsia and ethical reflections might come later. I ate the saleratus biscuit cheerfully, and was meditatively finishing my coffee when a gurgling sound from the rafters above attracted my attention. I looked up; under the overhang of the bark roof three pairs of round eyes were fixed upon me. They belonged to the children I had previously seen, who, in the attitude of Raphael's cherubs, had evidently been deeply interested spectators of my repast. As our eyes met an inarticulate giggle escaped the lips of the youngest.

I never could understand why the shy amusement of children over their elders is not accepted as philosophically by its object as when it proceeds from an equal. We fondly believe that when Jones or Brown laughs at us it is from malice, ignorance, or a desire to show his superiority, but there is always a haunting suspicion in our minds that these little critics *really* see something in us to laugh at. I, however, smiled affably in return, ignoring any possible grotesqueness in my manner of eating in private.

"Come here, Johnny," I said blandly.

The two elder ones, a girl and a boy, disappeared instantly, as if the crowning joke of this remark was too much for them. From a scraping and kicking against the log wall I judged that they had quickly dropped to the ground outside. The younger one, the giggler, remained fascinated, but ready to fly at a moment's warning.

"Come here, Johnny, boy," I repeated gently. "I want you to go to your mother, please, and tell her" —

But here the child, who had been working its face convulsively, suddenly uttered a lugubrious howl and disappeared also. I ran to the front door and looked out in time to see the tallest girl, who had received me, walking away with the child under her arm, pushing the boy ahead of her, and looking back over her shoulder, not unlike a youthful

she-bear conducting her cubs from danger. She disappeared at the end of the extension, where there was evidently another door.

It was very extraordinary. It was not strange that I turned back to the cabin with a chagrin and mortification which for a moment made me entertain the wild idea of saddling Chu Chu, and shaking the dust of that taciturn house from my feet. But the ridiculousness of such an act, to say nothing of its ingratitude, as quickly presented itself to me. Johnson had offered me only food and shelter; I could have claimed no more from the inn I had asked him to direct me to. I did not reënter the house, but, lighting my last cigar, began to walk gloomily up and down the trail. With the outcoming of the stars it had grown lighter; through a wind opening in the trees I could see the heavy bulk of the opposite mountain, and beyond it a superior crest defined by a red line of forest fire, which, however, cast no reflection on the surrounding earth or sky. Faint woodland currents of air, still warm from the afternoon sun, stirred the leaves around me with long-drawn aromatic breaths. But these in time gave way to the steady Sierran night wind sweeping down from the higher summits, and rocking the tops of the tallest pines, yet leaving the tranquillity of the dark lower aisles unshaken. It was very quiet; there was no cry nor call of beast or bird in the darkness; the long rustle of the tree-tops sounded as faint as the far-off wash of distant seas. Nor did the resemblance cease there; the close-set files of the pines and cedars, stretching in illimitable ranks to the horizon, were filled with the immeasurable loneliness of an ocean shore. In this vast silence I began to think I understood the taciturnity of the dwellers in the solitary cabin.

When I returned, however, I was surprised to find the tallest girl standing by the door. As I approached she retreated before me, and pointing to the corner where a com-

mon cot bed had been evidently just put up, said, "Ye can turn in thar, only ye 'll have to rouse out early when 'Dolphus does the chores," and was turning towards the extension again, when I stopped her almost appealingly.

"One moment, please. Can I see your mother?"

She stopped and looked at me with a singular expression. Then she said sharply: —

"You know, fust rate, she 's dead."

She was turning away again, but I think she must have seen my concern in my face, for she hesitated. "But," I said quickly, "I certainly understood your father, that is, Mr. Johnson," I added interrogatively, "to say that I was to speak to" — I did n't like to repeat the exact phrase — "his *wife*."

"I don't know what he was playin' ye for," she said shortly. "Mar has been dead mor'n a year."

"But," I persisted, "is there no grown-up woman here?"

"No."

"Then who takes care of you and the children?"

"I do."

"Yourself and your father — eh?"

"Dad ain't here two days running, and then on'y to sleep."

"And you take the entire charge of the house?"

"Yes, and the log tallies."

"The log tallies?"

"Yes; keep count and measure the logs that go by the slide."

It flashed upon me that I had passed the slide or declivity on the hillside, where logs were slipped down into the valley, and I inferred that Johnson's business was cutting timber for the mill.

"But you 're rather young for all this work," I suggested.

"I 'm goin' on sixteen," she said gravely.

Indeed, for the matter of that, she might have been any age. Her face, on which sunburn took the place of complexion, was already hard and set. But on a nearer view I was struck with the fact that her eyes, which were not large, were almost indistinguishable from the presence of the most singular eyelashes I had ever seen. Intensely black, intensely thick, and even tangled in their profusion, they bristled rather than fringed her eyelids, obliterating everything but the shining black pupils beneath, which were like certain lustrous hairy mountain berries. It was this woodland suggestion that seemed to uncannily connect her with the locality. I went on playfully : —

"That 's not *very* old — but tell me — does your father, or *did* your father, ever speak of you as his 'old woman' ? "

She nodded. "Then you thought I was mar ? " she said, smiling.

It was such a relief to see her worn face relax its expression of pathetic gravity — although this operation quite buried her eyes in their black thickset hedge again — that I continued cheerfully, "It was n't much of a mistake, considering all you do for the house and family."

"Then you did n't tell Billy 'to go and be dead in the ground with mar,' as he 'lows you did ? " she said half suspiciously, yet trembling on the edge of a smile.

No, I had not, but I admitted that my asking him to go to his mother might have been open to this dismal construction by a sensitive infant mind. She seemed mollified, and again turned to go.

"Good-night, Miss — you know your father did n't tell me your real name," I said.

"Karline ! "

"Good-night, Miss Karline."

I held out my hand.

She looked at it and then at me through her intricate eye

lashes. Then she struck it aside briskly, but not unkindly, said "Quit foolin', now," as she might have said to one of the children, and disappeared through the inner door. Not knowing whether to be amused or indignant, I remained silent a moment. Then I took a turn outside in the increasing darkness, listened to the now hurrying wind over the tree-tops, reëntered the cabin, closed the door, and went to bed.

But not to sleep. Perhaps the responsibility towards these solitary children, which Johnson had so lightly shaken off, devolved upon me as I lay there, for I found myself imagining a dozen emergencies of their unprotected state, with which the elder girl could scarcely grapple. There was little to fear from depredatory man or beast, — desperadoes of the mountain trail never stooped to ignoble burglary, bear or panther seldom approached a cabin, — but there was the chance of sudden illness, fire, the accidents that beset childhood, to say nothing of the narrowing moral and mental effect of their isolation at that tender age. It was scandalous in Johnson to leave them alone.

In the silence I found I could hear quite distinctly the sound of their voices in the extension, and it was evident that Caroline was putting them to bed. Suddenly a voice was uplifted — her own! She began to sing and the others to join her. It was the repetition of a single verse of a well-known lugubrious negro melody. "All the world am sad and dreary," wailed Caroline, in a high head-note, "everywhere I roam." "Oh, darkieth," lisped the younger girl in response, "how my heart growth weary, far from the old folkth at h-o-o-me." This was repeated two or three times before the others seemed to get the full swing of it, and then the lines rose and fell sadly and monotonously in the darkness. I don't know why, but I at once got the impression that those motherless little creatures were under a vague belief that their performance was devotional, and

was really filling the place of an evening hymn. A brief and indistinct kind of recitation, followed by a dead silence, broken only by the slow creaking of new timber, as if the house were stretching itself to sleep too, confirmed my impression. Then all became quiet again.

But I was more wide awake than before. Finally I rose, dressed myself, and dragging my stool to the fire, took a book from my knapsack, and by the light of a guttering candle, which I discovered in a bottle in the corner of the hearth, began to read. Presently I fell into a doze. How long I slept I could not tell, for it seemed to me that a dreamy consciousness of a dog barking at last forced itself upon me so strongly that I awoke. The barking appeared to come from behind the cabin in the direction of the clearing where I had tethered Chu Chu. I opened the door hurriedly, ran round the cabin towards the hollow, and was almost at once met by the bulk of the frightened Chu Chu, plunging out of the darkness towards me, kept only in check by her riata in the hand of a blanketed shape slowly advancing with a gun over its shoulder out of the hollow. Before I had time to recover from my astonishment I was thrown into greater confusion by recognizing the shape as none other than Caroline!

Without the least embarrassment or even self-consciousness of her appearance, she tossed the end of the riata to me with the curtest explanation as she passed by. Some prowling bear or catamount had frightened the mule. I had better tether it before the cabin away from the wind.

"But I thought wild beasts never came so near," I said quickly.

"Mule meat's mighty temptin'," said the girl sententiously and passed on. I wanted to thank her; I wanted to say how sorry I was that she had been disturbed; I wanted to compliment her on her quiet midnight courage, and yet warn her against recklessness; I wanted to know

whether she had been accustomed to such alarms; and if the gun she carried was really a necessity. But I could only respect her reticence, and I was turning away when I was struck by a more inexplicable spectacle. As she neared the end of the extension I distinctly saw the tall figure of a man, moving with a certain diffidence and hesitation that did not, however, suggest any intention of concealment, among the trees; the girl apparently saw him at the same moment and slightly slackened her pace. Not more than a dozen feet separated them. He said something that was inaudible to my ears, — but whether from his hesitation or the distance I could not determine. There was no such uncertainty in her reply, however, which was given in her usual curt fashion: "All right. You can traipse along home now and turn in."

She turned the corner of the extension and disappeared. The tall figure of the man wavered hesitatingly for a moment, and then vanished also. But I was too much excited by curiosity to accept this unsatisfactory conclusion, and, hastily picketing Chu Chu a few rods from the front door, I ran after him, with an instinctive feeling that he had not gone far. I was right. A few paces distant he had halted in the same dubious, lingering way. "Hallo!" I said.

He turned towards me in the like awkward fashion, but with neither astonishment nor concern.

"Come up and take a drink with me before you go," I said, "if you 're not in a hurry. I 'm alone here, and since I *have* turned out I don't see why we might n't have a smoke and a talk together."

"I durs n't."

I looked up at the six feet of strength before me and repeated wonderingly, "Dare not?"

"*She* would n't like it." He made a movement with his right shoulder towards the extension.

"Who?"

"Miss Karline."

"Nonsense!" I said. "She is n't in the cabin, — you won't see *her*. Come along." He hesitated, although from what I could discern of his bearded face it was weakly smiling.

"Come."

He obeyed, following me not unlike Chu Chu, I fancied, with the same sense of superior size and strength and a slight whitening of the eye, as if ready to shy at any moment. At the door he "backed." Then he entered sideways. I noticed that he cleared the doorway at the top and the sides only by a hair's breadth.

By the light of the fire I could see that, in spite of his full first growth of beard, he was young, — even younger than myself, — and that he was by no means bad looking. As he still showed signs of retreating at any moment, I took my flask and tobacco from my saddle-bags, handed them to him, pointed to the stool, and sat down myself upon the bed.

"You live near here?"

"Yes," he said a little abstractedly, as if listening for some interruption, "at Ten Mile Crossing."

"Why, that 's two miles away."

"I reckon."

"Then you don't live here — on the clearing?"

"No. I b'long to the mill at 'Ten Mile.'"

"You were on your way home?"

"No," he hesitated, looking at his pipe; "I kinder meander round here at this time, when Johnson 's away, to see if everything 's goin' straight."

"I see — you 're a friend of the family."

"'Deed, no!" He stopped, laughed, looked confused, and added, apparently to his pipe, "That is, a sorter friend. Not much. *She*" — he lowered his voice as if that potential personality filled the whole cabin — "would n't like it."

"Then at night, when Johnson 's away, you do sentry duty round the house ? "

"Yes, ' sentry dooty,' that 's it," — he seemed impressed with the suggestion, — "that 's it ! Sentry dooty. You 've struck it, pardner."

"And how often is Johnson away ? "

"'Bout two or three times a week on an average."

"But Miss Caroline appears to be able to take care of herself. She has no fear."

"Fear ! Fear was n't hangin' round when *she* was born ! " He paused. "No, sir. Did ye ever look into them eyes ? "

I had n't, on account of the lashes. But I did n't care to say this, and only nodded.

"There ain't the created thing livin' or dead, that she can't stand straight up to and look at."

I wondered if he had fancied she experienced any difficulty in standing up before that innocently good-humored face, but I could not resist saying : —

"Then I don't see the use of your walking four miles to look after her."

I was sorry for it the next minute, for he seemed to have awkwardly broken his pipe, and had to bend down for a long time afterwards to laboriously pick up the smallest fragments of it. At last he said cautiously : —

"Ye noticed them bits o' flannin' round the chillern's throats ? "

I remembered that I had, but was uncertain whether it was intended as a preventive of cold or a child's idea of decoration. I nodded.

"That 's their trouble. One night, when old Johnson had been off for three days to Coulterville, I was prowling round here and I did n't git to see no one, though there was a light burnin' in the shanty all night. The next night I was here again, — the same light twinklin', but no one

about. I reckoned that was mighty queer, and I jess crep' up to the house an' listened. I heard suthin' like a little cough oncet in a while, and at times suthin' like a little moan. I did n't durst to sing out for I knew *she* would n't like it, but whistled keerless like, to let the chillern know I was there. But it did n't seem to take. I was jess goin' off, when — darn my skin! — if I did n't come across the bucket of water I 'd fetched up from the spring *that mornin'*, standin' there full, and *never taken in!* When I saw that I reckoned I 'd jess wade in, anyhow, and I knocked. Pooty soon the door was half opened, and I saw her eyes blazin' at me like them coals. Then *she* 'lowed I 'd better 'git up and git,' and shet the door to! Then I 'lowed she might tell me what was up — through the door. Then she said through the door, as how the chillern lay all sick with that hoss-distemper, diphthery. Then she 'lowed she 'd use a doctor ef I 'd fetch him. Then she 'lowed again I 'd better take the baby that had n't ketched it yet along with me, and leave it where it was safe. Then she passed out the baby through the door all wrapped up in a blankit like a papoose, and you bet I made tracks with it. I knowed thar was n't no good going to the mill, so I let out for White's, four miles beyond, whar there was White's old mother. I told her how things were pointin', and she lent me a hoss, and I jess rounded on Dr. Green at Mountain Jim's, and had him back here afore sun-up! And then I heard she wilted, — regularly played out, you see, — for she had it all along wuss than the lot, and never let on or whimpered!"

"It was well you persisted in seeing her that night," I said, watching the rapt expression of his face. He looked up quickly, became conscious of my scrutiny, and dropped his eyes again, smiled feebly, and drawing a circle in the ashes with the broken pipe-stem, said: —

"But *she* did n't like it, though."

I suggested, a little warmly, that if she allowed her father to leave her alone at night with delicate children, she had no right to choose *who* should assist her in an emergency. It struck me afterwards that this was not very complimentary to him, and I added hastily that I wondered if she expected some young lady to be passing along the trail at midnight! But this reminded me of Johnson's style of argument, and I stopped.

"Yes," he said meekly, "and ef she did n't keer enough for herself and her brothers and sisters, she orter remember them Beazeley chillern."

"Beazeley children?" I repeated wonderingly.

"Yes; them two little ones, the size of Mirandy; they 're Beazeley's."

"Who is Beazeley, and what are his children doing here?"

"Beazeley up and died at the mill, and she bedeviled her father to let her take his two young uns here."

"You don't mean to say that with her other work she 's taking care of other people's children too?"

"Yes, and eddicatin' them."

"Educating them?"

"Yes; teachin' them to read and write and do sums. One of our loggers ketched her at it when she was keepin' tally."

We were both silent for some moments.

"I suppose you know Johnson?" I said finally.

"Not much."

"But you call here at other times than when you 're helping her?"

"Never been in the house before."

He looked slowly around him as he spoke, raising his eyes to the bare rafters above, and drawing a few long breaths, as if he were inhaling the aura of some unseen presence. He appeared so perfectly gratified and contented, and

I was so impressed with this humble and silent absorption of the sacred interior, that I felt vaguely conscious that any interruption of it was a profanation, and I sat still, gazing at the dying fire. Presently he arose, stretched out his hand, shook mine warmly, said, "I reckon I 'll meander along," took another long breath, this time secretly, as if conscious of my eyes, and then slouched sideways out of the house into the darkness again, where he seemed suddenly to attain his full height, and so looming, disappeared. I shut the door, went to bed, and slept soundly.

So soundly that when I awoke the sun was streaming on my bed from the open door. On the table before me my breakfast was already laid. When I had dressed and eaten it, struck by the silence, I went to the door and looked out. 'Dolphus was holding Chu Chu by the riata a few paces from the cabin.

"Where 's Caroline?" I asked.

He pointed to the woods and said, "Over yon: keeping tally."

"Did she leave any message?"

"Said I was to git your mule for you."

"Anything else?"

"Yes; said you was to go."

I went, but not until I had scrawled a few words of thanks on a leaf of my note-book, which I wrapped about my last Spanish dollar, addressed it to "Miss Johnson," and laid it upon the table.

. . . . . .

It was more than a year later that in the bar-room of the Mariposa Hotel a hand was laid upon my sleeve. I looked up. It was Johnson.

He drew from his pocket a Spanish dollar. "I reckoned," he said cheerfully, "I 'd run agin ye somewhar some time. My old woman told me to give ye that when I did, and say that she 'did n't keep no hotel.' But she

allowed she 'd keep the letter, and has spelled it out to the chillern."

Here was the opportunity I had longed for to touch Johnson's pride and affection in the brave but unprotected girl. "I want to talk to you about Miss Johnson," I said eagerly.

"I reckon so," he said, with an exasperating smile. "Most fellers do. But she ain't *Miss* Johnson no more. She 's married."

"Not to that big chap over from Ten Mile Mills?" I said breathlessly.

"What 's the matter with *him*," said Johnson. "Ye did n't expect her to marry a nobleman, did ye?"

I said I did n't see why she should n't — and believed that she *had*.

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